

16th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME; Cycle – A; July 23rd 2023
Wisdom 12:13, 16-19; Romans 8:26-27; Matthew 13:24-43

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

It is estimated that between the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke Jesus gives 33 parables, which are unique to the synoptic gospels. What is a Parable? A parable is **a short and simple story that teaches a religious or moral lesson**. A parable is not just meant for the entertainment of the ears; rather Jesus uses them to convey a great message and truth or to teach a moral lesson. Out of these 33 parables 12 of them are known to be the **kingdom parables** where Jesus compares the Kingdom of Heaven or God with certain individuals or material things in the world. It is easy to recognize the kingdom parables, as normally they begin with the words of Jesus, “The Kingdom of Heaven is likened to.. Through these parables Jesus reveals the great truth about the nature of the Kingdom of Heaven. Matthew alone has 7 kingdom parables and some of them are unique to him.

By the way what does Matthew mean by the ‘**Kingdom of Heaven**’? Matthew uses the phrase **kingdom of heaven** thirty-two times, and is the only gospel writer who uses it. The other three use “**the kingdom of God.**” There is no significant difference between “**the kingdom of God**” and **the kingdom of heaven**. The former phrase emphasizes the sovereign Ruler of the kingdom and the latter stands for the kingdom itself, but they are the same kingdom.

The **kingdom** has two aspects, the **outer and the inner**, both of which are spoken of in the gospels. Those aspects are evident as one moves through Matthew. In the broadest sense, the kingdom includes everyone who professes to acknowledge God. Jesus’ parable of the sower represents the kingdom as including both genuine and superficial believers (Matt. 13:3–23), and in His following parable (vv. 24–30) as including both wheat (true believers) and weeds (false believers). That is the outer kingdom, the one we can see but cannot accurately evaluate ourselves, because we cannot know people’s hearts. The other kingdom is the inner, the kingdom that includes only true believers, only those who, as John the Baptist proclaimed, repent and are converted. God rules over both aspects of the kingdom and He will one day finally separate the superficial from the real.

In today’s gospel Jesus gives three kingdom parables out of which we have just selected the first one. Coming to this parable of the wheat and the weeds we have the following lessons to learn. It teaches us that there is always a hostile power in the world, seeking and waiting to destroy the good seed which is the Word of God. As we know,

these two **influences of good and evil** are always visible among the people and they are in fight against each other. Jesus also shows how hard it is to distinguish between the wheat and weeds; means good and evil; those who are in the kingdom and those who are not. By mere appearance we cannot judge one whether he/she belongs to the Kingdom or out.

Above all, this parable is the typical example to show how patient God is with the sinners. The farmer allowed the weed to grow till the time of the harvest. Of course, literally speaking, the weed cannot become wheat even though time is given. *But there is a possibility for a sinner to change his/her life when opportunity is given.* One of the great qualities of God is, His compassion and patience towards human beings; His graciousness to accept us as we are. This is indeed, the quality which we miss very often when we deal with our fellow beings. *It is the common complaint we hear from people that they lose patience with people.* In both Old Testament and New Testament God is pictured to be most compassionate and patient. We read in Psalm 145:8, '**The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in love.**' In today's first reading which is from the Book of Wisdom the author gives us the quality of God. He says, "**But though you are master of might, you judge with clemency, and with much lenience you govern us.**" This is what Jesus teaches us through the parable of the wheat and weeds. *God does not take any pleasure in the eternal death of a sinner; rather he waits for his/her returns or conversion.* **In the Book of Ezekiel 33:11 we read, "As I live, says the Lord, I swear, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked man, but rather in the wicked man's conversion, that he may live."**

None of us can claim that we are very patient in dealing with our fellow beings; none of us is free from the evil of rash judgment either. **Why do I lose patience? The reason is very simple that very often you don't come up to my expectations and criteria.** The problem lies in the fact that when I deal with you, I create a norm in my mind as what you should say and how you have to behave. But as we are unique human beings, you cannot become I and I cannot become you. No doubt, as human beings we all fail, if they fail today, I fail tomorrow. So, we are sailing in the same boat and we have no right to judge others as good or bad. God who sees the innermost conscience of a person can judge correctly. As we don't see the conscience of a person our judgment can go wrong. Let us keep in mind the great truth that nobody is totally good or nobody is totally bad. Even a sinner can change when we give a favorable situation and show a kind gesture towards him/her. After all, who are we to condemn someone? Jesus predicts, **"The first will be the last and the last will be the first."**