

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Last year, on April 15, people around the world were in grief and shock when the Notre Dame Cathedral was in flames. Hundreds gathered outside the cathedral, many in tears, as flames destroyed that masterpiece, that treasure, and that symbol of Christianity in France and in the world. The exact cause of the fire remains unknown even now.

However, after the Notre-Dame Cathedral fire, many Catholic churches in France have been burned or desecrated; altars have been vandalized and statues defaced. And all these things have been done intentionally by human beings.

Recently, many other Catholic churches around the world continue to be burned and vandalized. In Vietnam, for example, last month a man went into a church in Saigon and set fire to the sanctuary area right in front of the Blessed Sacrament. In the United States, last weekend at least four Catholic churches in four states were vandalized. And a man in Florida, who set a church on fire while people were at Mass, told the police officers that he was on a mission to attack the church. Honestly, I can't imagine why anyone comes to church, not for worshipping God nor praising Him, but for destroying the church and killing innocent people in it. I don't know why a few continue to do that. And I don't know how many churches will be attacked in the future.

When these things happen, people might ask themselves many questions about the goodness of God and the existence of evil. Why does God allow these things to happen? Why does God allow evil in the world? Does evil win out over good? Why is God silent when evil happens right in front of Him? And for us, even though we have faith in God, our faith may also be challenged in one way or another. So, I hope, with the light of today's Gospel, Jesus will help us understand more about the goodness of God and the existence of evil.

In the story of the Gospel, Jesus tells us how evil exists in the beautiful world created by the all-powerful and good God. Like a farmer who sows good seeds in his fields, God brings everything good to the world. But, evil exists because "an enemy has done it." "While everyone was asleep his enemy came and sowed weeds all through the wheat, and then went off." This refers to Genesis, when "God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good." His enemy, Satan, a fallen angel, distorted the world. So, God never sows the weeds in the fields of his farm. God never creates evil in the world. But his enemy has done it.

And in the parable, Jesus tells us that, when the slaves of the householder saw the weeds in the field, they came to their master and asked him, "Do you want us to go and pull them up?" But, the master says, "no, ... let them grow together until harvest, then at harvest time I will say to the harvesters, 'First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles for burning; but gather the wheat into my barn.'" In other words, let the good and evil

grow up together until the end of age. And at the judgment day, good and evil will be separated. God will separate the children of God from the children of evil.

Please note that what Jesus says “let the wheat and the weeds grow together until harvest” it is not a lesson for farmers, gardeners, or politicians, but for his followers who are on the journey to the kingdom of heaven. On this journey, there are both good and evil. There are good people and bad people. And we tend to want to get rid of bad people right away. However, we are reminded that only God knows who is good and who is bad. And He will separate them on the judgement day.

So, when evil seems to prevail or God seems to be silent before evil, it does not mean that God is weak or that he compromises with evil. For God is powerful and just, but He is also patient and forgiving. Evil will be destroyed on the last day when Jesus comes again in glory to judge the living and the dead.

We sang the responsorial psalm today, “Lord, you are good and forgiving.” Yes, God is good and God is forgiving. And we can see His goodness and His forgiveness through His son Jesus Christ. He did many good things for people, yet he was treated like a criminal. When Jesus was slapped by a guard, I don’t know about you, but to me, I thought he would have killed that man immediately. But he didn’t. Jesus did not call on the angels to destroy that man. And when Jesus was nailed on the cross, he was insulted by people saying, “Save yourself... come down from the cross if you are the son of God.” Nothing happened. Nothing happened. Jesus did not come down from the cross. And then the chief priests, the teacher of the laws, and the elders mocked him in the same way, “He saves people, but he cannot save himself.” Jesus was still on the cross. And people did not see any miracle. However, right after that, a wonderful miracle happened when Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” This is the miracle of forgiving. He destroys hatred by His love. He destroys sins by forgiving. He destroys death by his own death on the cross. His good destroys evil.

My brothers and sisters, we live in the world with good and evil, lots of wheat and lots of weeds. And God is so merciful with those he created. He is the God that the first reading tells us of today, “your might is the source of justice; your mastery over all things makes you lenient to all.” And “you gave your children good ground for hope that you would permit repentance for their sins.”

So, in spite of weeds, in spite of evil in this world, Jesus emphasizes and confirms that the kingdom of heaven will come and evil must be destroyed on that day, and there will be a harvest – a harvest of people who want to know God, to love God, to serve God in this world and be happy with Him forever.

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July, 2020