

HOMILY 16th Sunday Ordinary Time

July 19, 2020

When I bought my first house, I bought it during the winter. When I looked outside, the owners told me that the flower beds in the back yard were full of perennials, and they are quite beautiful in the summer. I thought, that will be nice, and did not give it much thought. And since it was during the winter, I could not tell what was there. When I moved into the house it was June. The flower beds in the yard just looked like a mess to me. The sellers were moving so they probably did not take very good care of the flower beds. I was working on the inside of the house, so I decided to just let go of the yard for a while. So around about the end of July I decided it was time to tackle those flower beds. I invited one of my friends over who did a lot of gardening and asked her to tell me what were flowers and what were weeds. She looked for a while and this is what she said: “Jim, the only way you are going to be able to tell what are flower and what are weeds is if you pull everything out. What grow back are weeds.” She told me that I had let it go too long and the roots of the flowers and the weeds were so intertwined that all I could do was to start over.

In the Gospel reading we hear the parable of the wheat and the weeds. The workers asked the master if they should pull out the weeds and he tells them no. If

you pull out the weeds you will also uproot the wheat. Now the purpose of a flower garden is different than the purpose a field of wheat. The purpose of a flower garden is to look pretty. My flower garden was never going to look pretty so I had to start over. The purpose of a wheat field is to produce wheat. It does not really matter if the wheat field looks pretty. What matters is that the wheat field produces wheat. So the master wanted to let the wheat and weeds grow together and then harvest the grain and throw out the weeds.

I think the flower garden and the wheat field represent two different views of the Church. One view is that the Church is like a flower garden. It must look good. It should be filled with people who believe everything the Church teaches and never questions anything, obeys all of the rules and lives a perfect Christian life. This Church would look good, but no one would be here including me. In the words of Pope Francis, the Church is not a haven for the perfect, it is like a field hospital taking in the weakest, the infirm. The perfect do not need the Church, the rest of us do.

There is also a big difference between plants and people. If you plant a wheat seed, you get a wheat plant. If you plant weed seeds you get weeds. There is no free will involved. The weeds cannot become wheat and the wheat cannot become weeds. They just become what they are by their nature. People are not like that.

Everyone has the ability to change if they want to. And we cannot tell the saints from the sinners on this earth. That will be decided when we come face to face with God on the last day. That is when each of us will reap what we have sown. God knows everything about us, even the number of hairs on our head. There is no fooling him. And until that time we all need to grow together. Our lives are so intertwined that what we do profoundly affects the people around us. We have found that with the whole wearing masks issue right now. Either we are all going to wear masks and stop the spread of the coronavirus or if some of us choose not to wear the masks, the corona virus will spread and our children will not be back in school in the fall and more people will get sick and die. It is not an individual rights issue it is a public health issue. No shirt, no shoes, no mask, no service. It is not about us and them, it is just us.

We all have a profound effect on one another. Our lives are intertwined. The only question is whether we will have a positive or negative effect on the people around us. And we have to hang in there with one another. We have found this with Black Lives Matter. Either we will all join together and change things or we will all lose. We need to interact with people who are different from us and try to understand one another. The minute we condemn someone we distance ourselves from them and we become a negative influence. We need to use our charisms, our

gifts, our abilities to help others. During this pandemic, we are all a little more anxious, so find creative ways to be kind to one another. I was anxious about going into a salon to have my hair cut, so my stylist cut my hair in his back yard. That was an act of kindness that I really appreciated. We cannot tell the difference between the saints and sinners in this world, but if you think someone may be a sinner, it is up to you to hang in there with them and help them. And hopefully when we are acting like weeds, someone will help us. We may not be as pretty as a Church, but we definitely can be fruitful.