

Homily 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time (23.7.17)

**'Take seeds of His Spirit, let the fruit grow ...'  
- Fan into a flame the gift you've been given**

I love the Parables, as I said last week, and these parables are all about the Kingdom, of course. I've purposely left out the interpretation Jesus gives later of the three parables, so that the crispness of His message and delivery can be maintained. In that 'Kingdom' level, if we work backwards, and look at the yeast the woman used, Jesus is saying that the message, the gospel message, God's message, is like the small amount of yeast which can absolutely expand the dough. And really this is not just about the Kingdom out there, but also about the way the Parables apply to ourselves, our inner life. For us that means the yeast in me. If I am the three bushels of wheat – then the yeast in me will produce bread.

And then the other Parable of the mustard seed. It's the smallest of seeds, but when it's grown it becomes a shrub big enough to shelter birds. We see that image in the way the Church has prospered and waned and grown over the centuries. Think of the Church in the Dark Ages – the early Medieval period. Society was collapsing in the western world, and the monasteries became the place for education, healthcare, and general well being for the people. Just a little bit of faith – (the mustard seed,) can grow into a powerful force in the world.

Then we come to the wheat and the darnel, explaining the mystery of evil in the world, or rather not explaining it, merely observing it. That's the darnel in the world, 'some enemy has done this.' It's beautifully put without trying to explain it away. But the evil is not what God intended, He planted good seed. The mystery of evil is among us today, but God doesn't yet separate people one from another. He leaves that until the final judgement at the consummation of the world. This Parable is powerful spirituality for ourselves, because of course we are both wheat and darnel, and to pull out the darnel from ourselves would destroy something of what we are. Yet obviously we are called to produce a harvest.

I can give you a perfect example of the effects of the darnel in Fr Mark's life. I can talk like this now that because he's dead. Many of you would have known him, but not all of you would have been aware that he was an alcoholic. It was the curse of his life – it was the darnel he had to contend with. He did manage to gain the upper hand when he joined Alcoholics Anonymous, but the 'disease' had always to be fought with. Towards the end of his life as a recovering alcoholic he did say that looking back over his life, he wouldn't have changed a thing, apart from the 'wasted years.' Because the dark side, and many of the mystics would say this too, that our dark side, the darnel in us, is often where we get our energy. And no matter what our darnel might be – passion, anger and so on, it's all about tapping into the right channels, and channelling this energy, this darnel in the right direction.

I can remember Fr Mark going into Scalebor Park, which was a residential detoxification centre for alcoholics, and the sort of people that were in there, frightened the pants off me – they looked like they chewed glass for fun! But Fr Mark had a bond with them, you know – they adored him. He was able to mix with them, there were no airs and graces with him. He had no sense of class. He was classless with others because he could recognise the humanity in them, not only through his priesthood, but through the darnel in himself. Ironically he ended up performing a valuable ministry in there, even though, of course, he was there to recover himself. Fr Mark is a perfect example to me of how the Parables speak to us, and how we need to apply them to our own lives.

So, a good exercise again would be to look at yourself, and what you consider to be the bad side, the darnel, in your own life. Look at it afresh and see where the energy is in that darnel – and like a recovering alcoholic, to channel it differently. That is the real energy that can transform you, that will enable you to produce a harvest in your own life, of abundant wheat!