

The Sixteenth Sunday of the Year

Since my return from the sabbatical month in Israel, many people have enquired about whether I witnessed any violence or unrest. There was no violence but unrest and tension was always under the surface or sometimes explicit.

Before I went to Jerusalem I had made up my mind who was to blame for the political and ethnic tension and trouble, it seemed easy to point the finger at the source of the problem. Now, having lived and studied in Jerusalem for a month, it is impossible to point the finger in any particular direction. Yes, there is much that is wrong and unjust but the causes are complex and shared by many different people. As soon as one evil is isolated, to eliminate it would do all kind of damage to innocent and well meaning situations.

And so, as Jesus reminds us, just the same is the Kingdom of Heaven. Goodness jostles alongside evil both living together like weeds and wheat in a field. This is true for the Kingdom as it is true for the whole of our human experience; for the Church, for the economic world where millions of people are disadvantaged and hungry and, very recently, for the world of media and communications.

Our response, as those nourished by the Word of God and attempting to live our lives as subjects of the Kingdom, will be outrage and horror when we encounter evil and the actions that grow out of it. Like the servants in the parable we will want to go and weed out the weeds, surgically remove the damaged parts and actions, the evil that we think that we can so easily identify.

But we deceive ourselves if we think that evil and those things which we identify as bad and damaging are easily removed like pulling up a weed. No, as the man in the parable said, if you pull up the weed, then you will pull up the good as well. Let them both grow together.

There are lots of implications and challenges for us. The first is that when we identify something that is bad or damaging we only see its effects and not the connections which join it to so many other things that might be good or necessary. That was certainly true for me as I tried to analyse the situation in Israel Palestine. The more I thought about the injustice and disadvantage to so many, the more I could see that the situation was connected to all those who live advantaged and comfortable lives, not just in Israel but across the world. If our judgement is informed by Jesus we will soon come to see that an evil we identify outside ourselves will be linked to something in our own lives and we shall be moved to repent and ask for the intervention of the one who can heal every situation, the Holy Spirit.

The weakness in our own lives contributes to the weakness in other situations outside ourselves. That is why St. Paul says that the Holy Spirit comes to help us in our weakness. In fact the love and power of God comes to join us in the struggle against all those things that do harm and the process begins within

each of us. That is why, surrounded by so many things that trouble us, we must be patient and wait for the certain healing process that the Holy Spirit brings about, always working against evil and bringing God's purpose to its good completion.

Patience in the face of wickedness of all kinds, waiting on the action of the Holy Spirit, does not mean that we do nothing. We have a responsibility to work for good as the parables of the mustard seed and the batch of bread show. The man had to plant the seed for the mustard seed to grow and for the shrub to be large and strong enough to shelter birds. The woman had to do the work on the flour and the leaven to produce the batch. The same is true for us. As disciples and members of the Lord's household, we are called upon to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the Lord's own work of healing and reconciliation. So where do we begin?

In trust our lives must be marked and filled with prayer in which the Holy Spirit prays within us enlarging the capacity of our hearts and lives for forgiveness and healing to operate wherever we are.

That prayer will help us to see where the evil and sin are and how it is connected to something within us or within our style of life or the decisions we make and which we too easily assume are good in themselves.

The Holy Spirit within us will sharpen our awareness and help us see where it is we can pour in love to bring new hope and to begin the process of healing in a divided or broken situation.

And the more we can cooperate with the Holy Spirit in our weakness the more we will see the need for our own lives to change; the more will be ready to receive the gift of forgiveness particularly in the Sacrament of Confession or Reconciliation.