

Sunday Homily

16TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

19 JULY 2020

YEAR A

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK IV

“Let them both grow till the harvest.”

Illustration

In the 1950s, faced with the spread of Soviet and Chinese communism, the United States turned in on itself to root out the enemy within. Home-grown communists were believed to be everywhere – from Hollywood actors and directors, to lawyers, civil rights workers, teachers and trade unionists. J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI spearheaded the efforts to weed out this internal threat. There was an atmosphere of mistrust and fear as friends and colleagues denounced each other, thousands of government workers were dismissed without just cause, while other people, such as the great Charlie Chaplin, abandoned the USA in search of greater freedom abroad. The very standards and values of democracy which the US government was so determined to defend were in fact being eroded by the corrupt methods used to identify the so-called “Reds under the bed”.

Gospel Teaching

The desire to root out perceived evil is a universal temptation for humanity. Hitler’s concentration camps, Stalin’s purges, China’s Cultural Revolution, the Spanish Inquisition and the witch-hunts of medieval Europe – humanity’s history is littered with the bloody attempts to create by force a pure and uncontaminated society.

Religion is particularly prone to the desire to create a perfect community of the saved. After all, isn’t that the point of faith – to strive for perfection and to root out sin? So it is striking to hear Jesus warn against such zeal. In response no doubt to questions about how the faithful should respond to the presence of evil in the world – and perhaps even within the community of believers – Jesus rejects the solution of the witch-hunt and inquisition: let both weed and wheat grow together, side by side, until the harvest.

Only God can judge the human heart, and if mere human beings set themselves up to be judge, jury and executioner, then the long dark history of persecutions, show trials and extermination camps provides ample evidence that the good are inevitably going to be destroyed along with the bad, the wheat will be pulled up with the darnel.

That is not the way with the kingdom of God. The other two parables go on to show that the kingdom is not to be imposed by force and violence. It is a kingdom that grows gradually – even from small beginnings – like the mustard seed. Such