

Homily for the 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Have you ever done something good before that someone else came along later only to sabotage? Let's say like you were working on a 1,000 piece puzzle with your family on a vacation to the Pocono's which you've almost finished. But while taking a break, you turn your head just in time to see one of the little ones crumpling up the puzzle pieces, which are now mostly in a heap on the floor. You know what I mean? And no, that thankfully didn't happen on my vacation last week – but, we did manage to put together two 1,000 piece puzzles!

Well, the farmer in today's Gospel parable was in a similar dilemma. He just planted his seed crop in the field. But unbeknownst to him, along came his enemy, who sprinkled weed seeds in amongst the wheat. Now, for the first several weeks until those seeds sprouted and grew, the farmer would have had no reason whatsoever to expect anything other than wheat to grow. However, a rude awakening came his way a short time later when he got the report from his laborers that the field was filled with weeds!

Now, right away, the laborers propose taking action – ripping up those weeds right away. Can you imagine having to look at those weeds for a whole planting season, being reminded day in and day out of the malicious wrong someone purposely did to you? Another idea might have been to go after the perpetrator, and either beat him up or do the same thing to his field, to get revenge. But neither of those options would fix the issue at hand for that innocent farmer.

Instead, this prudent farmer takes a very wise approach, and allows the weeds and the wheat to grow together until the harvest. Otherwise, trying to rip up the weeds early could have destroyed the wheat crop too. Even more, maybe any disturbance of those weeds would have caused any airborne seeds to spread, and then the problem would just have gotten worse.

Now, the farmer was able to take this sensible action because he was able to see the big picture. If he got frustrated and upset right away, it would have cost him in the long run. But, by realizing at harvest time that both the weeds and the wheat could be harvested and then be separated, he was able to make lemonade out of lemons! And all this farmer needed to do was be patient, and time would vindicate him. Now, that's so easy to say – “just be patient”. And, how many of us, ourselves, have heard that advice, tried it, only to flat out fail?! You know, I imagine if we were in the situation of that innocent farmer, I'm not quite so sure we would have been so patient or innocent!

So, what was his secret? Well, as I just said – he was able to see the big picture. Before he sought revenge or took some other unhelpful action, he hit the pause button, and saw the situation through to the end. He knew he could still have his crops AND he could keep his peace, which would have made that enemy even madder!

There's a similar lesson here for us too. Patience is a virtue that can only be cultivated by being tested. We can't develop any virtue in a vacuum. Like a muscle that needs resistance in order to grow, so too do virtues, like patience, need to be tested. So, when you're following someone doing 15 miles per hour under the speed limit, you could either tailgate them all the way and arrive at your destination maybe two minutes sooner and fuming; or, you can hit the pause button and see the big picture and choose to handle this in a better way. Or, when you don't get your way, you can either throw a fit and then feel guilty afterwards; or, you can take a breath and realize the issue at stake's not that big a deal anyway and manage to keep your peace.

We might classify ourselves as impatient people, but that does not give you or I the right to keep acting that way. We must strive for patience. And the reason is because God is tremendously patient with us. As we heard in the first reading today from the Book of Wisdom: "But though you are master of might, you judge with clemency and with much lenience you govern us..." God has every right to be "impatient" with us – He's perfect! Imagine if we didn't learn a life lesson the first time around and God just said, "I give up. There's no hope for you!" But, that's not God. And that's not who we're called to be either. With the help of God's grace, we are to seek to be gentler, kinder, less selfish, and more patient people – with God's grace. Good thing for us – with all the weeds that we have in our lives – God still gives us a lifetime before the harvest! God bless you.