

16<sup>th</sup> Sunday  
7/23/2023

## THE GOOD GROUND FOR HOPE

Have you ever asked, why doesn't God just zap all the evil out of the world. God is all good and evil is evil, wouldn't that simplify things a lot? Well, if God were to zap all the evil out of the world, none of us would be here right now. Reflecting on this, Pope Benedict once observed, God is a patient and we suffer because God is patient and yet we ourselves are in need of God's patience, in need of God's mercy.

The first reading speaks about the *Good ground for hope*. Not only is hope a good thing but there is good ground, good reason for hope. It goes on, you would permit repentance for their sins. In other words, we have hope because God is merciful, because he allows us to repent, to turn around. At the root of every call to repentance, no matter how strong, is hope. If we're doomed and there's nothing we can do about it, there's no need to repent.

Unlike wheat and weeds that stay what they are, people are different. People can move from a state of aversion *from* God to a state conversion *to* God. They can also move in the other direction from conversion to aversion. That is something that should give us both caution and hope. Caution, not a petrifying fear, but certainly caution, because we can lose the gift we have received by doing evil. Hope because we can regain the gift we have lost by responding to God's call to repentance. We're also reminded that there will be harvest when, like clay placed into a kiln, our decisions will be made permanent. We call that judgement.

Judgment isn't something we like to think about but it's real and a mystery we will face. Every time we pray to the creed we acknowledge this. *He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead*. This parable tells us not to judge too quickly or respond violently and that God is the one to judge and that he desires repentance. Such repentance is turning again and again away from sin and towards

God; from evil to good, from death to life. It is something we're called to do not just during Advent and Lent but always. This finds expression at every celebration of Mass when we participate in what is appropriately called, yjr a penitential rite.

The servants are concerned about the crop. They are ready to pull out the weeds. They want to do what is good but that desire points to a shocking term: the temptation to do good. What does that mean? Aren't we supposed to do good always? Yes. Aren't we supposed to turn away from evil always? Yes. But St. Paul tells us that the evil one can disguise himself as an angel of light and what seems to be a good may actually bear bad fruit.

The man who sowed the field has the wisdom to realize that pulling up the weeds would also mean pulling out the wheat. In other words, the perceived good actually would have caused harm. Think of a chain smoker who quits and then goes to all his smoking friends and says, *I used to be poor, miserable and disgusting just like you. Here's what you need to do and I'm going to fix you.*

In some cases, the temptation to do good is a temptation to do what appears to be good but in fact, is not—like pulling up weeds but taking the wheat with them. Sometimes the temptation to do good can cause more problems than the temptation to do evil. This calls us to be patient, with others, with ourselves, not to excuse ourselves but to realize that we're limited, finite, flawed people but we have a goal that is infinite and that we are to be patient with God and his timing as well.

God's love, mercy and patience that allows us to repent is our good ground for hope and it can be found in many ways. We seek forgiveness for ourselves not only at the beginning of Mass but every time we pray the Our Father. In the Lord's Prayer we not only ask for forgiveness, we ask it only to the extent that we're willing to forgive others. Shakespeare described mercy as something twice blessed as it blesses both the giver and the receiver.

God's mercy doesn't mean that what we do doesn't matter. God's mercy is always a call to deeper intimacy with him, to deeper conversion. God's mercy means

that God has a better plan for our lives. Our good ground for hope includes prayer. At one time or another everyone will struggle in prayer but in the second reading St. Paul says we don't know how to pray as we ought but the Holy Spirit helps us. Those are comforting words. We don't do it by ourselves. God's word to us in the Bible, the saints in both their prayers for us and their examples to us as well as the encouragement of one another also form part of our good ground for hope. Our God given conscience within us, when properly formed and properly listened to, also make up part of this ground.

And of course the Sacrament of Reconciliation is the privileged place to repent, to turn around and to not only experience God's love, patience and mercy but hopefully to allow that love, patience and mercy become a part of who we are, what we do and how we interact with others. Reconciliation forms some rich soil in our good ground for hope.

The great gift of the Eucharist where we enter into the hour of Jesus' saving death and resurrection; where Jesus calls us together as his people, nourishes us with his word and feeds us with his body and blood as we join him in the Holy Spirit worshipping God the Father with him, also forms part of that good ground.

With lives of intentional faith may ongoing penance, ongoing conversion, fill our hearts with both a healthy caution and a confident hope. May it lead us away from temptation and opens our hearts, minds and lives more fully to the patient love of our God. In all of this may we always find good ground for hope.