

**Homily – July 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>  
Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A**



There are, as always, a number of ways of approaching the readings we hear during liturgy. One helpful idea as we try to tease out some meaning from today's readings is to make the distinction between

the Kingdom of God, on the one hand, and the Kingdom of Heaven on the other. Usually we mash them together thinking one means exactly the same as the other. Not so. In its simplest form, the Kingdom of God is the present; it's what you and I are living right here, right now. It is the world as it is with its beauty and its ugliness, its justice and its injustice, its love and its indifference, its joy and its misery, its random acts of kindness and its senseless acts of violence, its wheat and its weeds. It is the Kingdom of God because God created it, God is in the middle of it, and God is redeeming it. When we talk about the Kingdom of God we are talking about how God comes to us in the messiness of our lives—our personal lives and the life of the entire world. The Kingdom of God is the imperfect world we live in, a world moving towards perfection but not there yet. The Kingdom of God is the clay in the potter's hands that has not yet reached its completion as the masterpiece it was always meant to be.

The Kingdom of Heaven, on the other hand as you may suspect, is more akin to "heaven," the ideal existence we hope to experience after we die. It is not imperfect or incomplete like the Kingdom of God; it is the ideal. The Kingdom of heaven is like the Garden of Paradise before the fall of Adam and Eve. It's what life was once like, and it is what life should become once again. You might say the Kingdom of Heaven is the past (Garden of Paradise) and the future (heaven), where the Kingdom of God is the mixture of good and evil of the present.

Matthew, our gospel writer this year, is the only one of the four gospel writers who speak of the Kingdom of Heaven. The other three—Mark, Luke, and John --speak of the Kingdom of God. Matthew says in today's gospel passage, "The Kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a field of wheat that eventually grows uninhibited by weeds, or a tiny mustard seed that eventually become a great tree, or a little bit of yeast that eventually helps dough to become bread, food for the world.

A young man in our parish grouping posted on his Facebook page this week a quote that I found both inspiring and fitting for today's readings. It simply read, ***"Don't forget to smile even when life is hard and you feel like giving up, there is a future you haven't seen yet."*** We smile in a world that is imperfect, a world that often gets us down; that's the imperfection of the Kingdom of God. However, "there is a future we haven't seen yet;" that's the Kingdom of Heaven. As depressing as the 6 o'clock news can be, or your life can be, or the Church can be, we live with something called Christian hope. Optimism says, "Today wasn't so good, maybe tomorrow will be better." Christian hope says, "I don't know if tomorrow will be better, but I do know that God is with me today and God will accompany me tomorrow."

When we pray, in the Our Father, "may your Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven," we are saying, "may the perfect Kingdom of Heaven push into the imperfect Kingdom of God and bring it to perfection." It's a radical prayer as it asks us to give up our little kingdoms that the great Kingdom may ultimately take hold of us. Our job is to help the Kingdom of God, this present world, morph into the Kingdom of Heaven.

However, until that day comes about, we live and move and have our being in this world—the Kingdom of God. It's here our salvation is being worked out. It's here where we don't always know how to pray, so we sigh and yield to the Spirit praying in us.

Until we draw our dying breath, we will live in the Kingdom of God, a field with both wheat and weeds. We are cautioned not to be hasty in pulling up the weeds. There is a part of each of us that wants to do that.

There is a part of us that doesn't like the grey of life but prefers an imaginary world of black and white. That part of us, our underdeveloped ego, always wants us to see ourselves as only light, a light ready, willing and able to repel the dark. Jesus calls that hypocrisy.

Isn't it interesting that the only people Jesus had trouble with were hypocrites. He made little inroads with them, although not for a lack of trying on his part. The hypocrite in each of us refuses to believe that we are, and always have been, a mixture of good and evil, of wheat and weeds, of sinner and saint. We all have a shadow, that we need to embrace daily if we are to grow spiritually. Fr. Richard Rohr prays for a daily and necessary humiliation each day. I'm not that daring in my prayer life, although humiliation still finds its way into my life.

I've also learned, with time, to actually befriend my shadow, the weeds in my life. What appeared to be weeds at one point, with a little bit of time and maturity under my belt, later proved to be graced moments, moments of growth I was actually thankful for. For example, early on in the game I prayed to God that should I become a priest I would prefer not to work with intellectually challenge people nor with inmates in prison. These were the weeds I was convinced that would be holding me back from growing. Thirty years ago, both of these groups of people came into my life, enriched me then and still do now. It was as if God was saying to me, and I listened just enough, "Phil, let the wheat and weeds grow together for now, otherwise something good in your life will be uprooted unnecessarily."

Here's a little story that illustrates that for me.

*Gurdjieff used to have a spiritual community in the early 1900s. In the spiritual community of Gurdjieff which he led in France, an old man lived there who was the personification of difficulty, irritable, messy, fighting with everyone, unwilling to clean up or help at all, and no one got along with him. Finally, after many frustrating months of trying to stay with the group, the old man left for Paris. Gurdjieff quickly followed him and tried to convince him to return. But it had been too hard, and the old man said,*

*“No!” At last Gurdjieff offered the old man a big monthly stipend if only he’d return. How could he refuse? When he returned everyone was aghast. And on learning that he was being paid, while they were being charged a lot to be there, the community was up in arms. Gurdjieff called them together and after hearing their complaints, he laughed and explained: “This man is like yeast for bread. Without him you would never really learn about anger, irritability, patience, and compassion. That’s why you pay me, and that’s why I hire him!”*

*Fr. Phil*