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Retreat on Living Religiously By Faith in the Year of Faith
Sisters of Jesus our Hope, Bloomfield, New Jersey
July 29 to August 2, 2013
Ex 33:7-11; 34:5b-9, 28; Ps 103; Mt 13:36-43

Becoming God's True Wheat

- Throughout this 13th Chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, Jesus has been helping us to understand the response of faith to his action through parables taken from easily understood agricultural metaphors. In the Parable of the Sower and the Seed that we heard last week, he helped us to take a soil sample of the receptivity of our hearts. Are we the hardened soil by the wayside, stubborn in our habits, having heard the Gospel so many times that it no longer has the power to change us? Are we the rocky, superficial soil, that listens to the word of God for enjoyment, likes it, immediately springs up some growth, but as soon as crosses or other difficulties arrive, the growth of the seed withers because the roots don't reach to the underground living water where they can grow? Are we full of the thorns of worldly cares and anxieties that choke the growth of faith in response to the Word of God? Or are we good soil that, in faith, bears fruit from God's interaction with us, and not just "some fruit," but abundant fruit, that the Word of God changes us in 30, 60, 100 ways or more? Yesterday, we focused on Mary's receptivity in faith as the model for every believer's. Cardinal Ratzinger said about her and God wants to be said about you: "She is ... the interpretation of the parable of the seed sown in good soil and yielding fruit a hundredfold. She is not the thin surface earth that cannot accommodate roots; she is not the barren earth that the sparrows have pecked bare; nor is she overgrown by the weeds of affluence that inhibit new growth. She is a human being with depth. She lets the word sink deep into her. "
- Today, however, through another parable, Jesus deepens our understanding of the context of growth in faith during this Year of Faith by helping us to understand that sower, seed and soil do not exist in a vacuum. There's also an enemy out there who, because he can't destroy the Owner of the field wants to sabotage the crops. Today we celebrate the feast of St. Peter Chrysologus, the fifth century bishop and doctor of the Church who battled against the heresies of Arianism (which denied Jesus' divinity), Monophysitism (that Christ had only one nature, rather than a divine person with two natures, human and divine) and Eutychianism (which said that Jesus had a human body and soul but no human spirit, in St. Paul's tri-partite schema, which implied, of course, that Jesus wasn't fully human); all three of these were attempts by the devil that if he couldn't destroy Christ even by the crucifixion, he would try to impair and incapacitate true faith in him. Later this morning, as we continue our study of Lumen Fidei, we'll ponder 13 different challenges to the growth of faith, 13 different types of dandelion, that likewise threaten the growth of faith today. But we can contextualize all of these threats by means of the parable Jesus gives us today. We also see Jesus' confidence that about the power of the growth of the seed of faith even amid the vandalism of the evil one.
- The first thing we capture is what is ultimately supposed to happen in faith. We who have received the seed of the Word of God on good soil not only bear manifold fruit but in turn become seed that God tries to plant in the soil of the world. Jesus himself is the grain of wheat that fell to the ground and died, but in so doing, bore much fruit. Through the life of faith, Jesus grows in the soil of our heart such that we become more and more identified with him as he sows us in the world. The good seed, he tells us, are the children of the kingdom, those who have become sons in the Son, those who live with Christ the King in the kingdom of love he has established. That's the goal of our life. With the language of the new encyclical, we, having been illumined by Christ, having been lit on fire with the fire of his love, are sent out into the world with that same flame to light the world ablaze.
- The parable makes clear that there is also an enemy sowing his own children. In St. John's Gospel, Jesus describes the devil as a father of lies, and tells those who are opposing him that they're not truly children of Abraham, our father in faith, because his word had no room among them. Rather "you belong to your father the devil and you willingly carry out your father's desires. He was a manslayer from the beginning and does not stand in truth because there's no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he speaks in character,

because he is a liar and the father of lies.” But the lies the evil one sows at night, in a darkness that hates the light, are not so outlandish that they would be spotted. In fact, they seem like truth, they seem like good seed. The context of the parable is that in the Holy Land the weeds Jesus is describing initially look very much like wheat. As they sprout from the soil and begin to grow it’s almost impossible, even for farmers, to distinguish them from the wheat. It’s only later, when they’ve grown sufficiently, that you can tell the difference, but by that point their roots are so intertwined with the roots of the wheat that you can’t uproot the weeds without destroying the wheat, so farmers need to let them grow until harvest time and then go through the laborious process of separating the wheat from the weeds by hand. Similarly, at the beginning, many of the lies of the devil seem credible. We see that with Adam and Eve. We see that with the 13 half-truths we’ll consider later this morning in the second conference on *Lumen Fidei*. We see that in so many of the temptations we face in faith. If something seemed an outright lie, if something were recognized as plain evil, it would lose much of its power over hearts that are made to seek the good, but at the beginning, we can’t tell the difference and when we consent to it, it starts to grow in such a way that its roots become firm in us and it’s very hard to get rid of it. And our world is full of the darnel. As we look out at the fields, there seems evil to be more weeds than wheat. As farmers we can be tempted almost to lose hope for a successful harvest, or we can shudder at the sheer amount of work it’s going to be to separate wheat from chaff.

- But Jesus doesn’t seem to share our phobias. When the servants in the parable, which we heard on Saturday, ask him, “Do you want us to go and pull them up?,” the Master replies, “No! If you pull up the weeds you might uproot the wheat along with them. Let them grow together until the harvest.” The servants were obsessing about the weeds. The Master was not. He basically was telling the servants, who are obviously almost the good seed, to focus all their attention on bearing fruit, on doing good, rather than on the eradication of the evil. This is a perennial lesson for us. We can often obsess so much about the problems of others’ not practicing the faith, about the challenges, about the vast multiplication of darnel in our part of the vineyard or in other parts of the field that we can fail to bear fruit. These weeds can become like thorns in Jesus’ first parable of the Sower and the Seed. Jesus tells us to focus on what we can control.
- He does this for another reason as well. The parable indicates to us that in the early days, we can’t tell who is good seed and who is bad seed, who are truly children of the kingdom and who are children of the evil one, who is living according to the truth and who is living according to half-truths. Most of us have a Christian hubris that just presumes we’re the children of the kingdom, that we’re the true wheat, and that others are the damned darnel, but we don’t have the eyes to see that. If we went out deracinating too early, we would have lost Peter, whose first words were that he was a sinner. We would have lost Paul, who used to kill Christians for a living. We would have lost Augustine. We ourselves, at many times in our life, likewise would have been uprooted and thrown away. But as the Lord said to Moses in the first reading and we prayed in the Responsorial Psalm, the Lord is a “merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity.” His mercy extends for a thousand generations, far greater than the three to four generations that our sins can damage. Therefore, we need to wait to see the true growth, to see what happens in the fertilizer of the Lord’s own mercy.
- Likewise, when we focus too much on eliminating the weeds, it’s easier for them to envelop us. Our fundamental task is to allow the seed of the Word of God to grow in us, to allow that fallen grain of wheat to develop in our soil so that we may become fruit-bearing wheat that he can plant in the midst of the world, in the soil of other people’s hearts so that they, in turn, may grow up to be true wheat. God wants the children of the kingdom, which we pray to be and become, one day to shine like the sun in the Kingdom of the Father, and hear to shine, as Pope Francis loves to say, as the *mysterium lunae*, as the mystery of the moon, reflecting the sun’s light in the midst of the darkness of the night, so that those walking in darkness may see the children of light and follow them into the radiance of the day that will know no sunset. We leave to the Lord the sifting that will be necessary to do later.
- The greatest means given to us by God to bear the type of fruit he wants us to bear is here at Mass, when that Christ the grain of wheat is implanted within us in Holy Communion, so that we can bear fruit in loving, faithful union with him. Back in 107, St. Ignatius of Antioch, as he was being brought in chains to Rome to die for our faith, wrote to the Christians in Rome and said, “I am God’s wheat and shall be

ground by the teeth of wild animals. . . . Let me be food for the wild beasts, for they are my way to God. I am God's wheat and shall be ground by their teeth so that I may become Christ's pure bread." The wild beasts were not merely the animals he was awaiting in the amphitheater, but also the children of the evil one, but he recognized that they were a means by which he would become not only a Christian in name but a Christian indeed. Likewise the contradictions we experience in life from the weeds in the field are meant to help ground us up into God's wheat so that together with the true wheat of God, Christ himself, we may together with him fall to the ground and die, to be crucified with him, so that we may live by faith in him and bear fruit for the world's salvation. The Israelites marveled that Moses spoke to God face-to-face as a man speaks to another. We should never lose that wonder. But God loves us so much that he took on a human face, he took on our entire human nature, so that we might not only see him, not only speak to him, but become one with him in a loving, faithful covenant that far exceeds anything the Jews could have ever fathomed. We don't have to go outside the camp to meet him in a tent. He now comes to tabernacle himself within us. And there won't be a pillar of cloud coming down upon the altar, the holy shekinah. Instead the Holy Spirit will come to overshadow me and the altar so that this bread and wine will totally change into God's own son, and then overshadow us all, so that we might become one body, one spirit in Christ.