

16th Sunday of ordinary time homily, A cycle 7/23/17

Some of us were out in the community knocking on doors and inviting neighbors to join us in prayer. One woman we visited said that she cannot wait to retire because she is visiting a protestant church and they have an excellent bible study. Indirectly, she was saying that we don't. Well, let me tell you, we have a Catholic Bible Study every Sunday when we gather to break open God's word and let it sink deeply within our hearts.

For instance, since Easter season we have been reflecting on Matthew's Gospel which has five major sermons

1. Sermon on the Mount

- a. Beatitudes: "blessed are the poor of spirit; blessed are the merciful... etc"**
- b. "You are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the world; let your light so shine so that others may see your light and give praise to our heavenly father."**

2. Missionary sermon

- a. "If you love father and mother more than me, you cannot be my disciple; If you love brother or sister more than me, you cannot be my disciple."**

3. Sermon of parables

- a. Parable of the sower going to sow his seed, some fall among the thorns and is choked; some fall on the path and takes root but has no depth; some falls on rocky ground and cannot take root. Last week Deacon Mark mentioned that the seed fall in OUR hearts and asked us to consider how receptive are WE to the Kingdom of God.
- b. Today we have the parable of the wheat and the weeds. The man goes out and sews wheat in a field. Then at night an enemy comes and plants weeds among the wheat. The workers on the farm are very upset and they ask the farmer if they should pull out the weeds. The farmer says, No, you may pull the wheat out with the weeds,
- c. We also hear the parable of the mustard seed. The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who planted a mustard seed. It is the smallest of all seeds (it actually isn't). The seed grows into a large bush in which the birds of air come and rest in their branches.

As we reflect on these two parables, I would like to do so with what is happening now in our lives.

This week we celebrate the 50th anniversary of what call a race riot in Detroit, others call a revolution, and every one can certainly call an

uprising which drastically changed our community. How many of us were even born 50 years ago?

RESULTS OF THE UPRISING

- 43 dead
- Neighborhoods devastated
- Billions of dollars of property damaged
- A community on edge.

I would like to reflect on what was happening in the hearts of people in those days following the uprising. People were saying: Someone was sowing weeds in the midst of their wheat field and ruining our crops!

To apply one of today's gospels to today's parables, many good seeds had been planted in the white community and within our parish boundaries in the days preceding the uprising.

There were three Catholic parishes in our boundaries: Immaculate Heart of Mary Church, St. Gerard Church and St. Eugene Church.

The three parishes combined had over 4,000 registered households, over 12,000 members. Fifteen years later, in 1982, there were only 800 households left. Families, neighborhoods and communities were disrupted. We asked: "What happened? Someone has sewn weeds into their field of wheat."

At the same time before the uprising, in the Black community many people had come up from the South to get the good jobs in the automobile industry. With their new income, they were looking for good housing to live in. Others were returning from serving in WW II. The veterans were expecting to receive respect for honorably serving in the military. They had sown good seeds. But decent housing and respect were denied them. They had sown good seeds. But someone had sewn weeds into their field of wheat.

And what were the weeds of the uprising? They were seeds of racism, violence and fear.

We had forgotten the words of St. Paul in forming our communities: In Christ there is neither Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female; we are all one in Christ. And we forgot the words of Jesus. We saw the splinter in other people's eyes and refused to see the beam in our own.

And what was our response to the wheat in our fields? We, like the disciples in Jesus' day, tried to pull out the weeds which was mingled deep down with the wheat.

Our first response when we are threatened is to fight or to flee. Both happened in our community as an attempt to root out the weeds in our midst. Violence, especially among the young (both white and black youth) increased in our neighborhoods. Oh yes, we fought.

We also had flight; we fled in big numbers. (One of our ushers, Ken Troupe, was a freshman in high school at Northern. His Ninth grade class in 1967 was 50% white, 50% black. By his senior year, his class was 95% black and 5% white.)

We were living out the parable of the weeds and wheat. We were blind to the weeds growing in our fields, our parishes, our neighborhoods. Many whites wanted to protect our investments (neighborhood covenants); Many African Americans wanted a piece of the American pie at all costs.

The 1967 disturbance humbled ALL of us. It removed our blinders. It caused us to look deeply within ourselves. In today's parable of the wheat and weeds, Jesus suggests a direction to us. He says, let the wheat and weeds live together; it is difficult to distinguish one from another when they are growing up. Use the time God has given us to purify our own prejudices, our own internal angers and rage, our own

sinfulness, to confront the injustices of our society. He calls us to set his kingdom as the goal of our lives.

And after the uprising, That's exactly what this community began to do. **We became a welcoming community: This was not by accident, but by choice.**

- The priests and staffs of St. Gerard and Immaculate Heart of Mary went into the neighborhood. They asked each established neighbor to stay and welcomed each new member in the community. Go out to neighbors and welcome them.
- We opened the registration and welcomed all neighbors into our Catholic Schools.
- We joined groups, projects, committees to further racial harmony and economic disparity. The non-profit groups dealt with housing, youth activities, young adults, and neighborhood development.
- Yes, welcoming became part of our parish DNA.

(Pause)

Yes, we need to continually look at God's word and bring our experience to prayer. From prayer, we need to move into action.

God's word is like a mustard seed, which Jesus says is like the smallest of seeds. He says it will grow into a TREE!, not a bush. Smallest of

seeds OF WELCOME AND HOSPITALITY. A Large TREE which spreads out its branches and gives rest to the weary of the world. That has been our parish's response to what happened 50 years ago

Recently a young man approached me. He is going into his senior year of high school. He said, "Fr. Don, if there is project I can volunteer in the neighborhood, just let me know. Two weeks ago we had a group of young people from outstate come into the city. I invited this young man. He showed up all four days the group was here. Here is a young man who has brought God's word to prayer and has moved from prayer to action. May we plant our seeds deeply into the Lord and bear a full harvest for the kingdom.

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