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FR. JOE SOBIERAJSKI, S.J.

WISDOM 12:13, 61-19

ROMANS 8:26-27

MATTHEW 13:24-43

The kingdom of heaven is like  
a farmer who sowed good seed



One day, a time management expert was talking with a group of college business majors, and used an illustration that he hoped they would remember about how to manage their time when they got into the business world. He had a one gallon glass jar in front of him and into the jar he placed some rocks, relatively big ones, until he could fit no more into the jar. Then he asked the class “Is the jar filled?” to which the class replied as a whole, “Yes!” “Do you really think so,” he said, and then brought out from under his desk a small bucket of gravel. He dumped some gravel into the jar, shook the jar so that the gravel would settle around the big rocks, and did this two more times. Again, he asked, “Is the jar filled?” This time the class said, “No”. “Good,” he said, and then brought out another bucket full of sand. Like the gravel he poured some into the jar and shook it, and continued to do that until he could get no more sand into the jar. Again, his question, “Is the jar filled?” Some said, “Yes,” and others “Probably not.” He then reached below the desk and brought out a pitcher of water, and began to fill the jar with water until it was filled to the brim. He then asked, “What is the point of this illustration?” One eager student said, “No matter how full your schedule is, there is always time to fit in a few more things if you really try.” “No,” replied the expert, “that is not the point. *The point is this: if you don’t put the big rocks in first, you’ll never get them in at all. What are the big rocks in your life? What are the things that you value?*”

I’ve just told you a contemporary “parable.” Parables are not restricted to the Bible; we actually use them all the time to teach and inform. Certainly Jesus made good use of parables to try to get His point across to those who were truly listening to His words. Often His illustrations are “homey” ones that are easy for just about anyone to understand, but often, especially if people have not been listening carefully to what He said before moving to the parable, they are not understood at all.

In today’s Gospel from Matthew we continue the series of parables that Jesus began last week with the “Sower”. Today, we have three parables which are then followed by an explanation that initially seems to deal only with the first of the parables, the weeds among the wheat. Following on the imagery from last week, this week we have a farmer who has sowed

good wheat into his prepared fields, but someone else, his enemy, has, while the owner was asleep, sowed that field with “darnel”. Darnel is a kind of weed that looks like wheat in its early growth, but later when it is easy to distinguish it has already intertwined its roots with that of the wheat. The owner seems in an impossible position; so, his solution is to wait till the harvest when, although it may take some time, he can harvest both wheat and weeds. And, only then separate one from the other with the wheat going to the barn and the weeds being burnt for fuel. Later, Jesus explains to His Apostles that this is a parable about the Kingdom with the good seeds being the children of the Kingdom and the weeds, the children of the evil one. The harvest is the Day of Judgment, when the angels will collect the good and the bad, one for eternal reward and one for punishment.

At first glance, the other two parables, that of the mustard seed and the yeast seem to have little to do with the first, but they are related. For the Hebrews the mustard seed was considered an example of the smallest of elements, and even small transgressions of the Law were described as “mustard seeds.” The obvious point about the mustard seed is that despite its small size from it a large shrub can grow that gives shelter to the birds of the sky. Here, Jesus again seems to be talking about the potency of the “Word.” It is a parable which we have seen fulfilled. For three years Jesus preached the Good News in a relatively unimportant part of the world, to men and women who seem equally unimportant, and yet the small seed of His Word has grown into something more than just a bush the shelters birds. It has become the home for millions upon millions of believers. There is a great disproportion between the insignificance of the seed of the Kingdom preached by Christ, and the resultant growth, not simply now but also in the greatness of the Kingdom when it comes into its fullness. For the disciples the message was not just one of hope for the future, but also a reminder that if they could plant the smallest seed of faith, its growth could be beyond their imagination. Such encouragement seems to have spurred them on.

The parable of the yeast, again, emphasizes the fact that so little yeast can accomplish such growth in the flour which again means the Word and its effect beyond expected proportion. With the yeast, however, it is also the rapidity of the growth that seems to come into focus. The disciples have the responsibility to mix the yeast of the Word into the open hearts of those who willingly listen. The growth of the early Church was itself proof that many were simply hungry for the yeast that allowed the Church of believers to grow at such a rapid rate.

Both of these parables reflect back upon the first in so far as they both speak of the rich potency, the strength of the Word to grow and mature in spite of the weeds of the world. No one's faith exists in a world without temptations that would weaken and even destroy that faith, but the Word also gives strength to those who believe that they can not only exist but also flourish in such an environment until the end time. The Holy Spirit's presence is also the source of strength for those who hear the Word and live a life the faith.

These parables were important to both the original disciples and to those who immediately followed them. They were called upon to spread the Good News, but you can imagine how small and insignificant they must have felt. But the parables taught them that, through their faith in Jesus and with the help of the Holy Spirit, God could and would accomplish great things through them. You can imagine how important these images became for a people who suffered persecution both at the hands of Jews and Gentiles.

They should also give us some solace if we, too, sometimes feel overwhelmed by our vocation as Christians to spread and to share the Word just as those early Christians did. It is certainly clear to most of us that in our world of permissiveness and moral laxity, an enemy has sown weeds that would choke the seeds of faith. Every tool of our technological world that could be used for the good of human kind can also be and is being used for its degradation and destruction. It's difficult to conceive of how one combats such weeds that seem to grow up everywhere. We can become discouraged by the pervasiveness of evil in our world. Yet, our first parable seems to indicate that it is always to be like that. The evil of the world will continue to grow along with the good until the final day when the weeds and the wheat will be gathered and separated.

Jesus' final words, "Whoever has ears ought to hear," seems to indicate that you and I should not take these simple parables lightly. We are called not only to put our faith in the power of the word, and to be resolute in our call to continue to proclaim the Good News in our words and in our actions. While my opening parable about time management was meant to only be a simple example of a modern parable perhaps its message can help us here. *What are the big things in your life that you want to be sure you have time for?* I hope that your family and friends are among those things that you number as important, but I also hope that God and your faith is right there at the top. Like those big rocks placed first into the jar, our faith needs to be high on the list of things we value. If we let our ears hear what Jesus is trying to tell us today, and try to react to His words then we should be better able to deal with the evil

**that is always around us by allowing the strength of God's Word deeply rooted in our heart to successfully confront what ever would try to destroy it. If, however, our faith in the Word has no priority in our lives, where will we find the strength to wrestle with the weeds that can easily choke us?**