

Father Greg Morgan's Homily for

The 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

“The Catholic Church”, he said, “is an institution I am bound to hold divine — But for *unbelievers* a proof of its divinity might be found in the fact that no merely human institution conducted with such *knavish imbecility* [or *naïve stupidity*] would have lasted a fortnight.”

This pithy observation of the prolific Anglo-French historian, Hillaire Belloc, came to my mind when I was praying about today's Gospel. Irrespective of one's religious dispositions, the Catholic Church is a historical and cultural mystery. For as Belloc asserts, it is perhaps proof of the Church's divine origins that it has been able to survive, endure, and prosper — despite a litany of internal crises and catastrophes. From the spread of dangerous theological heresies — such as Arianism (the denial of Christ's divinity) and the rejection of Christ's Real Presence (that the Eucharists is just a sign not a reality) — to the shameful schism of the Protestant reformation; to the seemingly insuperable repetition of things like gross financial mismanagement and the horror of sexual abuse, even by those who we call “Father” — our spiritual fathers.

Much can be criticised about the members of the Catholic Church. And, yet, despite all this darkness; the Institution remains standing. It doesn't just stand; it still grows; it still challenges; it still attracts; it still educates; it still saves; it still glorifies God.

Today's Gospel is a consoling Gospel — precisely because we hear Jesus, himself – God incarnate – explain why this is exactly what we should expect. Note, first and foremost, that the Parable is about the “Kingdom of Heaven”. It is not about the “Kingdom of the world”. This is what we should expect within the Kingdom of heaven — the Church here on earth.

Now, the key to discerning the wisdom of Jesus words lies in understanding the difference between “wheat” and “darnel”. The good seed are the seeds of faith sown by Christ at baptism. When we are faithful to our baptismal dignity — live in a ‘state of grace’ — then we produce the ‘good fruit’ — wheat — symbol of holiness. The devil (the enemy) sows darnel amongst the good seed. And this is the fundamental point: darnel is a crop that, at its earliest stages of growth, looks exactly like wheat. It’s even referred to by horticulturists as the “false wheat”.

The devil is not stupid. The devil is, as St Paul said, an angel of light! That is to say, He chooses something that looks exactly like the good stuff; something that, at first, looks pleasing; looks attractive; and so, everyone is fooled! In the same way, no one chooses to do evil precisely because it is evil. People do evil because they perceive (wrongly) some apparent good in it: People lie in order to escape; People take illicit drugs so that they can escape from the reality of stresses & pains; People envy others so they don’t have to be grateful; People watch pornography or have affairs because they think it will make them feel more alive...And so on...

So Jesus is telling us: do not be fooled! Like in temptation, evil always hides behind something good! The devil, and evil hearted people, will even try to look like Christ!

Just as darnel masquerades itself, as wheat in order to give the appearance that it will make us strong; fulfilled; flourishing. However, when it comes to harvest-time, it has to reveal its true-self. When wheat is ready to harvest, the ears on the crop begin to hang down; heavy — symbolic of the fact that they are “full of substance”. But with darnel, as the ears are without any substance, the crop continues to stand straight. Its produce is actually considered poisonous. And so, like sin, it will leave the human soul empty; hollow; dead. Just like mortal sin! (Catechism of the CC 101?)

Now a strange aspect of the parable is that Jesus says both are allowed to grow side-by-side. The servants even say to the sower of the good seed, “do you want us to weed the darnel out?” Mysteriously, the sower of the good seed, Jesus, says, “no...” because you risk uprooting/harming the good crop too. One way to think of this is how God respects the power of human freedom: incredible power: He does not force anyone to love Him! He could have created us as law obeying zombies; but, instead, He made us in His own image and likeness! Intellect and free will. Respects that.

But, also, Jesus calls for patience. Because patience fuels right judgment. Evil will show itself in the end! And when it does, then we judge it and cut it down. Until then, we tread carefully, discern intelligently and prayerfully, lest we accidentally cut down the wheat instead of the darnel.

This brings me to the paradox of Catholicism. To return to Belloc’s sentiment, why is it the Church has lasted 2,000 years and not two weeks?

The world says that what the Church has to offer you is archaic and unenlightened darkness. The world says that the Church’s teachings are only there to make your life hard — to take away your freedom. And, indeed, they are hard. But, even if the Church is clouded by crisis and scandal, the reason why the Church remains alive and always will, is that unlike any other institution, she has refused to compromise on Christ’s teachings; because the Church knows they actually are Christ’s wheat; not the Devil’s darnel. They actually are true; not lies. They actually will set you free; not inhibit you. They actually will help you to be holy; not lukewarm. But to know this and to believe this we have to Listen. Listen first to Christ, the author of life; not to the sweet – but misleading – voices of this world. For one voice leads to the wheat holiness; the other to the darnel of mortal sin. Catholicism, when lived with integrity, is the wisdom to know the difference.