

Rev. Toan Do
Wisdom 12: 13, 16-19
Romans 8: 26-27
Matthew 13: 24-43

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
EPIPHANY CATHOLIC CHURCH
Louisville KY, USA
July 19, 2026

Do you want us, Jesus, to go and pull the weeds out of the grass or good seed? No. If you pull the weeds, you might uproot the wheat along with them. Let them grow together until harvest time. In the last two years since I moved to this area of Jefferson County in Anchorage or nearby, in the priest house there is a number of parishioners here who live in the neighborhood. We catch up on one another quite often. In the last two years I got to know this one parishioner very well. Every time I walk with my son Lou in the neighborhood, I often observe how this parishioner and neighbor works on his yard. He was so patient with such resilience, in the morning, especially in the summer, he would kneel down and at his age I give him so much credit, kneel down and pull the grass. New terms which I learned from him, also, that one word leads to another, crab grass.

We, of course, talked over the course of time and I learned that this neighbor, this parishioner, sees the crab grass as the enemy, not only to himself but also to the grass, he wants his yard to look beautiful. Because of that, he spends so much time doing the work to pull the crab grass out. Of course, it's only in the summer. For my own sake, and because this weekend the occasion works and fits together. I did look up the word in Oxford Botanical Dictionary and Oxford English Dictionary, it is defined here; crabgrass, also known as fingergrass. I was thinking, "why finger grass?" I imagined through the photo, the finger grass looks like it grows up so strong against the beautiful normal grass, or it tried to take hold of the ground so strongly that it is very difficult to pull it out.

The definition; crab grass is an aggressive warm season annual weed that germinates in spring, thrives in hot summer weather, and dies after the first frost. It is notoriously difficult to manage because a single plant can produce up to 150,000 seeds that lay dormant in your soil for years. As I read that, I said to myself of course, implying to this wonderful neighbor and parishioner. "Good luck to you pulling the crabgrass out! " (laughing) Because the more we try to pull it out the finger grass and crabgrass will continue to take hold of themselves. That imagery speaks so much to the gospel, the first parable today. Crab grass or weeds, they are

there. They were not sown, unlike the good seed in which the owner tried to sow on the soil, grow and become meaningful, to become something other than itself, to produce fruit.

Crabgrass or weeds are there. Even Jesus Himself seemed to imply to us that He was not able, or because of what God wanted Him to do. He was not going to try to tell His disciples to pull, or to take evil people out of this world. Because at the end of the day, as we all know, it is part of nature, it is part of God's creation. Evilness is there; it was not planted. Some of us, some human beings or peers are not so good, but they are there as part of God's creation. There is a choice. Not only is it in the first parable today, but also the second parable about the mustard seed which is planted, grows, and becomes full-grown, it is there for something else. Birds of the air come and take refuge on the branches.

Similarly yeast, like the woman who makes dough out of wheat, and that yeast becomes dough and makes bread. That yeast is to grow and to become something more meaningful. The three parables, in fact, complement each other. It is not for us. Jesus tried to tell His disciples then and also for us today, it is not for us to destroy or annihilate evilness. It is for us, each and every one of us here in our community to change or to attempt to change our bad behavior. Think about that for a moment. Three parables try to encourage us not to destroy others, not to annihilate others, not to put them out, but to change our behavior. We cannot change the nature of evilness. It is there. It is for God to do His work among us.

It is for us. We are invited. We are called to work on our own thinking, on our own actions, become better. Just think of an example on a societal level, we see that there are really some bad people. Example; those who are illegal drug smugglers. Believe me, they are my enemies because I think and I have seen how drugs can prey on innocent and vulnerable human beings. Those who do the work of illegal drugs to kill and destroy other innocent, vulnerable people. For me, they are my enemies. Also, for ourselves on a personal level, we so often experience this whenever we run into someone who disagrees with us; a small matter we can overcome, a stronger, more difficult matter becomes more difficult to overcome. When it comes to something we cannot overcome, that person who disagrees with us can become our own enemy, our hatred begins to creep in and takes over the beauty of our own nature.

It is in these three parables, particularly the three of them put together that Jesus wants us to challenge ourselves, try to change our thinking, try to change who we are, become better, and let alone evil people. For sure, Jesus seemed to agree and to condone there is such evilness in this world, but it is God's work to change or to try to save them. For us, change our nature, change our behavior and thinking to become better. Whenever we fall short of that; in the first and second reading today

from Wisdom and Paul's Letters to the Romans, we are once again reminded that when we fall short of who we are we should call on the gift of God's Holy Spirit. Often, so often, we don't even know how to pray.

So often we don't even know how to get out of our own trap of evilness, bad thinking, bad temptation and trying to harm others around us. Call on God. Rely on God's mercy and grace through the Holy Spirit, that is what we have. Those who believe in God have that gift. Just think of the owner, think of this parishioner, the one who tried to help the good grass grow by pulling out the crab grass or finger grass. At the end of the day as much as we try to help the grass, just like the Holy Spirit tries to help us become better, think better, and to behave more Christianly, the grass also needs the hands of a human being to help it survive in the midst of crab grass and finger grass in our society.

Evil, bad people, and bad things happen all around. So often we learn that we are invited to rely on God's grace, God's mercy through the gift of the Holy Spirit to become the person whom God has called us to be.