

We have another agricultural parable today, the parable of the wheat and the weeds, and two others; and their meaning is not immediately obvious, especially to us town dwellers; and how many of us use yeast very often, to leaven dough, and make bread? I tried it once, but soon got fed up of all that effort.

But these examples would have been commonplace to those who originally heard the parables – part of their everyday experience.

Jesus is not giving advice on growing wheat or making bread, he is telling these parables for a reason, to teach his hearers about the Kingdom of heaven.

The Kingdom of heaven, he says, may be compared to a man who sowed wheat in his field; but his enemy came, and sowed a weed, called darnel. They look the same as they are growing, you wouldn't know what you were pulling up, so you can't risk it – you must leave them both to grow till the harvest, then separate them – the farmers listening would have understood this.

But what they would not have got is the spiritual meaning - The spiritual reality being illustrated is that we in the world are the "field", and the parable says the one who

sowed the good seed is Jesus, the one who sowed the bad seed is the Devil, the Evil one.

So when we look at the world around us, we can see many good things, many good people, but also a lot of evil. And the point of the parable is that this is something that God allows - good and evil co-exist together in the world. We know this, we only have to look around us.

Take as an example a predatory animal such as the lion, to feed itself, it stalks and devours its prey to tear it apart – now you have to admit that the violence is regrettable, the pain and death of the animal that is slaughtered is regrettable, but no-one would argue for the mass slaughter or starvation of lions in order to protect the beasts they devour – we just accept this violence and slaughter as part of the natural order. St Thomas Aquinas, who uses this example takes it further when he says "There would be no virtue of the martyr without the cruelty of the tyrant." WE celebrate martyrdom – the saints who died for their faith in Christ and the Church, but there would not be martyrs without the cruel tyrants who put them to death. What Thomas is saying here is that even in the face of great evil, which no-one really

wants, least of all God, there can be great good, great virtue.

So good and evil exist together in the world, and this how it will be until the end of time.

Only then will the good finally be separated from the bad – in the field which is the world, wheat and weeds grow together, only to be separated and dealt with at the harvest – there can be no evil in heaven, it will be perfect; remember Isaiah's beautiful prophecy :

“and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together,
and a little child shall lead them;

The lion shall eat straw like the ox, they shall do no harm,
nor destroy in all my Holy mountain.....”

A vision of how it will be in God's perfect heaven - but it is God who is in charge of the harvest, God who decides, and God is patient with us, he is merciful – everyone and everything can be redeemed.

But there remains the frightening alternative, and we cannot deny the reality of hell, even though many would like to. This is what the Church teaches about it, from the

Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraphs 1035 and 1037:

“The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, ‘eternal fire.’ The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs.

God predestines no one to go to hell; for this, a willful turning away from God, mortal sin, is necessary, and persistence in it until the end. In the Eucharistic liturgy and in the daily prayers of her faithful, the Church implores the mercy of God, who does not want "any to perish, but all to come to repentance"

So we should pray that all people will be saved from this terrible fate, and not pass judgement on other people, and upon their relationship with God; the religious leaders of Jesus' day did just that, and condemned people out of hand. They thought they knew for sure who should be condemned and thrown into hell - but we don't know what is really going on inside a person's heart – only God knows that.

Then we have two shorter parables, which help us to understand how we should live in the world, while we

wait for the coming of Christ at the end of time. The parable of the tiny seed that grows into the biggest tree of all, and the parable of the flour with the small amount of yeast, which is enough to leaven it all through.

Jesus is saying to us we have to be patient for the seed to grow – it takes time for God's kingdom to become what he intends it to be: In the meantime, Jesus taught His followers that they had a role to play, which He compared to that of leaven or yeast - only a small amount was mixed into the flour, but its effects were felt throughout all the flour, causing it all to rise, and become a loaf of bread. The Church in the world is like that small amount of yeast, mixed in with the flour of the world – it will help the whole thing to achieve God's good purpose.

So we can see what the main lessons are for us from these parables:

There is both good and evil all around us, and we must of course try and do good, and avoid sin, but we must not be too hasty in our judgement of others, but leave the judging to God, who knows what is in people's hearts.

We must be patient and persevere, knowing that the kingdom is indeed growing towards its fulfilment.

We must be like leaven, so that as we live in the world, we can win souls to Christ by our words and our example.

This is our path to holiness, which, if we follow Jesus, whose path it is, will bring us at that final harvest to that reward promised by Jesus at the end of the explanation of the parable, "The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father."