

Our Gospel reading today is open to a host of interpretations from what we consider to be weeds, to what is of greatest value, and to begin with I'd like to share a story that may put things into perspective. It's a conversation, really, and I've asked two people to share it with me. The story is called: "God and Lawn-care." (see appendix)

As I said at the beginning, today's Gospel raises a host of questions or interpretations that Jesus is asking us to think about in sharing this parable with us. For example: What is a weed? Or, were there weeds in Paradise?

The little role-play we performed for you would say: 'NO'. All that God made was good, but when the fruits of Paradise were no longer available to us, and we had to turn to agriculture for our food-needs, we quickly began to distinguish between those plants which we found helpful for food, and those that were less so, and we began the process of fostering on type of plant over those which were less favoured.

Unfortunately, in doing so we also began to demonise those plants which were less desirable, and to weed them out, with the result that we lost many plants whose true value we never got to know, and today we have scientists going into the jungles of South America and elsewhere to look for plants that may retain some of the medicinal properties that could be useful today.

The same could apply to the story of the confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel. Up to that time, apparently, people could come together for this gigantic project, speaking the same language, but when people could no longer understand each other easily, it became a situation of us and them, - a situation which, over time, would develop in parochialism, racism, sexism, Ethnic intolerance, politics, religious persecution, and other ills.

In sharing this parable Jesus is inviting us, therefore, to go beyond thinking in terms of good and bad, right and wrong, to the true value of the situation in which we find ourselves. Here in Australia we find ourselves in what is very much a multi-cultural society, with all the richness of difference and

similarity that this allows. It gives us the opportunity to come together in many ways that allow for the building up of a true community, but it also allows for blinkered vision, which can be destructive of good community.

A good example may be our Catholic community here in South Yarra. Although we come from different backgrounds of race, nationality, politics and social background, yet, we are drawn together through our faith and worship of God, as well as through shared values, - and as a community we try to make that a reality through our out-reach to others in need through our Foodstore, Emergency housing, meeting facilities, and in whatever other way we can assist.

However, as with the example of agriculture, that does not mean that we have to accept everything as of equal value. Just as farmers cultivate the more useful qualities in the plants they grow, so we need to cultivate the values, which we recognise as of greater worth, trusting that with good practices those of less value will fade away.

An example of this could be the current debate about Euthanasia. The ultimate value we believe in is Life, and one aspect of that is the quality of life we are able to enjoy. Does that quality of life outweigh the value of life itself, and therefore, when life no longer satisfies, put an end to it?

Or, do we respect life so much that we'll make every effort to protect it, keep it safe and comfortable until it is time to die naturally, as God intended? We know that today, with good medical and palliative care no one has to suffer needlessly, while our ability to suffer and accept suffering as part of our life, remains our greatest asset in our growth to nobility, stature and holiness. What ought to be our choice?

Wheat, Weeds, or all of us in this together till the harvest time?

Appendix.

God and Lawn-care.

God to St. Francis:

Frank, you know all about gardens and nature. What in the world is going on down there on the planet? What happened to the dandelions, violets, milkweeds and stuff I started eons ago? I had a perfect no-maintenance garden plan. Those plants grow in any type of soil, withstand drought and multiply in abandon. The nectar from the long-lasting blooms attract butterflies, honey bees and flocks of songbirds. I expected to see a vast garden of colours by now. But, all I see are these green rectangles.

Francis:

It's the tribes that settled there, Lord. The Suburbanites. They started calling those flowers 'weeds' and went to great lengths to kill them and replace them with grass.

God:

Grass? But, it's so boring. It's not colourful. It doesn't attract butterflies, birds and bees, only grubs and sod worms. It's sensitive to temperatures. Do those suburbanites really want all that grass growing there?

Francis:

Apparently so, Lord. They go to great pains to grow it and keep it green. They begin each spring by fertilizing grass and poisoning any other plant that crops up in the lawn.

God:

The spring rains and warm weather probably make grass grow really fast. That must make the Suburbanites happy.

Francis:

Apparently not, Lord. As soon as it grows a little, they cut it, sometimes twice a week.

God:

They cut it? Do they then bale it like hay?

Francis:

Not exactly, Lord. Most of them rake it up and put it in bags.

God:

They bag it? Why? Is it a cash crop? Do they sell it?

Francis:

No, sir, just the opposite. They pay to throw it away.

God:

Now, let me get this straight. They fertilize grass so it will grow. And, when it does grow, they cut it and pay to throw it away?

Francis:

Yes, Sir.

God:

These Suburbanites must be relieved in the summer when we cut back on the rain and turn up the heat. That surely slows the growth and saves them a lot of work.

Francis:

You aren't going to believe this, Lord. When the grass stops growing so fast, they drag out hoses and pay more money to water it, so they can continue to mow it and pay to get rid of it.

God:

What nonsense. At least they kept some of the trees. That was a sheer stroke of genius, if I do say so myself. The trees grow leaves in the spring to provide beauty and shade in the summer. In the autumn, they fall to the ground and form a natural blanket to keep moisture in the soil and protect the trees and the bushes. It's a natural cycle of life.

Francis:

You better sit down, Lord. The Suburbanites have drawn a new circle. As soon as the leaves fall, they rake them into great piles and pay to have them hauled away.

God:

No!?! What do they do to protect the shrub and tree roots in the winter to keep the soil moist and loose?

Francis:

After throwing away the leaves, they go out and buy something which they call mulch. They haul it home and spread it around in place of leaves.

God:

And where do they get this mulch?

Francis:

They cut down trees and grind them up to make mulch.

God:

Enough! I don't want to think about this anymore. St. Catherine, you're in charge of the arts. What movie have you scheduled for tonight?

St. Catherine:

'Dumb and Dumber'. Lord, it's a story about.....

God:

Never mind, I think I just heard the whole story from St. Francis.