

Fr. Jack's Homily
July 19, 2026
Weed Watchers: Naming Harm with Compassion

From Matthew's Gospel today, it's just going to state in fact that there are weeds. And in particular, the Greek Gospel is not just a weed, but it's poisonous. So, we just have that in our world: weeds and wheat. Will all the weeds please stand up?

I was at a friend's house the other day and they said, "Is that a weed?" And I didn't know if it was a weed or if it was a plant, you know? And so what we need is weed watchers. People that are able to identify the poisonous weeds that are in our groups, in our country, in our world, in our church. Not that we can pull them out, destroy them, but to name them so that we don't get infected with that poison.

And so I look for weed watchers. And St. Cronan has some good weed watchers. Nobody can know everything, so it's good to have these weed watchers to say, "Hey, you've got to be careful here." And so I'll name a few of those.

Andrew Viragh, he's a weed watcher. Those that are anti-LGBTQIA+, he scopes that out for us, and in particular for me, coming from my background, I had been poisoned from a homophobic area. And so Andrew has helped me to deal with myself and get rid of some of that poison. We need those kinds of identifiers. or Dede up here. The moment I walked in here, Dede was up there talking about Medicaid expansion. On and on, Medicaid expansion. Showing us what is going on with the insurers, with the Republicans, trying to take healthcare away from those, especially those in the most in need. Or, Judy Gallagher, may she rest in peace. Judy was a weed watcher for clericalism. "Father, we don't do it that way here." I had been infected by that clericalism. And Judy not only helped me to see it out there, but in here too. And that's what we need in order to draw closer as a community in communion. Or, I'm thinking of Al Sprehe. Al Sprehe and I go back a long way, seminary, etc. And Al, in our social justice committee, always identifying racism and its deep roots, especially coming up from slavery. And also the Native American Indians and how we committed genocide. And a few years ago, our diocese did a study, published a paper called "Forgive Us Our Trespasses," kind of look back at our history and how slavery had affected our institutional church. Even Bishop Rosati and Archbishop Kenrick had slaves. And Al has always helped us to understand that. And in our church, in the sacrament of reconciliation, you confess your trespasses, and then you get a penance. And Al's pretty good about saying, "We haven't done our penance yet. We haven't had reparations." And so, again, another weed watcher. Trish Curtis is, she's our board member for the Immigration Refugee Ministry, our collaboration with seven other

parishes. And my background is that I'm very aware of a lot of immigration issues, especially nationally. And the last week has been horrible. ICE killed two more people. That's seven now. But Trish not only knows that, but she's down ground level, "Here's how we can help." And so she's the one who coordinated our food distribution for the 25 families that were afraid to go out. She's the one that lets us know about how we can accompany those who have appointments for ICE.

So we need those weed watchers. And the weeds are poisonous. And sometimes it gets to be like overwhelming. And so, thankfully for the Word today in Wisdom, it says, "You gave your children good ground for hope." Gave your children good ground for hope. Or Paul says that the Spirit comes to the aid in our weakness. That's kind of a mysterious thing that happens, that we can be somewhat overwhelmed or burdened. But there's some kind of weed that pops up.

I'm thinking of a couple of situations when I lived in Zambia, taught high school in the bush, and very poor. The students were all poor. They had to have uniforms, a white shirt, black pants, and leather shoes. And a lot of them had cardboard in the bottom of their shoes because of the holes. The latrines didn't work, so very unsanitary. Three times we couldn't have exams, we didn't have papers. Chemistry students didn't have any chemistry stuff. The eighth graders didn't have desks. And the Headmaster was stealing meat. In the midst of all that, a couple times a year, these students from the church, our little community there, they would put on a little celebration. "How do you do this?" All of a sudden, chicken up your ears. And then drinks, non-alcoholic. And they had a great time. In the midst of all that is against them. That's that good ground of hope. That's that spirit in the midst of weakness.

Or, another example is I was part of a program in the West Bank, in a little place called Nabi Saleh, which often was targeted by the Israeli troops. As a matter of fact, there was one house that had 100 tear gas canners hanging with all the tear gas that they sent over that way. And rubber bullets, sometimes real bullets. There's a kid with a scar by his temple. And so they're frequently interrupted by the Israeli defense group. And yet, after our program, a couple of us stayed around. An elder invited us to have a little barbecue. And so that whole group of folks were there. And we're in the midst of an occupied area. And they're laughing and singing and having fun and eating grilled chicken with a big spread. In the midst of that weakness, there was a spirit. It happens.

So I invite you to put your weed watchers on the altar today. Thank God. And also you, beware. Help to point out some of the poison that's in our world, in our country, in our church. So that more and more we might truly be a community that's celebrating the Spirit of God.