

Pastoral Reflection
16th Sunday of Ordinary Time
July 19, 2026

At the end of last week's Gospel, Jesus tells us "Whoever has ears ought to hear." This week, Jesus continues to talk to the people by the sea in parables, again with references to seeds and weeds. Fr. Jack has often counseled us to look for the "twists" in the parables, because this is where Jesus makes his point and frustrates the scribes and pharisees in the telling. I believe the twist in the parable of the field owner who finds weeds growing up with the wheat is that the owner leaves the weeds until the wheat is ready to be harvested. I'm no farmer, nor am I even a gardener, but I've heard many gardeners talk about "weeding" and getting rid of "volunteers" – plants that grow that are not a part of the crop, almost daily and at least weekly. Yet this farmer is content to let the weeds grow right along with the wheat. Of course in the end, the weeds are separated from the wheat and are burned, while the wheat that is harvested is saved. Jesus tells his followers that this symbolizes the end of the world, when the angels separate the "good" from the "bad".

The parable of the mustard seed is another example of a "twist." Jewish gardeners did not like to plant mustard seeds because of their twisty vines and the ability of mustard bush to take over too much land. Yet, Jesus uses it to represent his small band of disciples who will grow a Universal Church. The yeast leavening the bread brings life to the old flour, just as Jesus' words brought life to the old teachings.

God's ways are not our ways. I think that is obvious, especially in the first parable. The other readings today talk of God as merciful and kind, slow to anger, and admonishes God's just followers to be the same. God even sends the Spirit to intercede for us and allow us to repent, so as to grow closer to God.

I find today's lessons some of the hardest to follow. They get right to the point to "love your enemies." Those weeds growing with the wheat (whoever *they* are) are really hard to take, and we want to admonish them and get them out of *our* garden. All of the turmoil and strife in the world is caused by *others*, and we in our justice want to weed them out now! But that is not God's way, is it? We must sow justice, but with kindness and mercy. Kind of hard to do when we see injustice wherever we look. We need to rely on the Holy Spirit to keep us merciful – to guide our justice and temper it with kindness and mercy – even for those we might deem as unjust.

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