

# Read



Wisdom 12:13, 16-19  
Psalm 86:5-6, 9-10,  
15-16

Romans 8:26-27

Matthew 13:24-43 or  
13:24-30



## REFLECTION

Looking around at the Church today may make us echo the question asked in the parable of the weeds and the wheat, asking Jesus, "Didn't you sow seeds of mercy and justice in your Church? Where did all this scandal, judgment, sin, and injustice come from?" Many of those who walk away from the Church do so because they can't see any good in a faith that can't seem to transform the people who proclaim it. Others want to pull out whichever pieces of the teachings or structure of the Church they blame for the sins of her members.

When faced with frustration, fear, and doubt over the state of the Church, it can be comforting to know that Jesus knew it would be this way. The harvest is coming. The evil in the world will seek greed and power everywhere, including the structures and communities of the Church. Still, the children of the kingdom of heaven are in the Church everywhere men and women work quietly to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, house the homeless, and proclaim the Gospel!

## QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ Have you or someone you know been affected by scandal in the Church? How did you or that person respond to that?
- ❖ What evidence have you seen of the kingdom of heaven at work in the Church?

## Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 23, 2023

## ACTION

What is true of the Church is true also of individual hearts. The same rich soil that can produce our virtues can also be fertile ground for our faults and vices. Think about your best traits and try to identify any faults that may be intertwined with them. Maybe your wit turns into biting sarcasm or your gentle heart becomes overwhelmed with despair for the world. How can you water your virtues while taking responsibility for your faults?

Bishop Barron encourages us to fight for our faith and our Church: "Why Remain Catholic? (With So Much Scandal)"

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ani\\_hnN8Fs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ani_hnN8Fs)





July 23, 2023

# SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

## LECTIONARY #106A

Wisdom 12:13, 16-19

Psalms 86:5-6, 9-10, 15-16

Romans 8:26-27

Matthew 13:24-43 or 13:24-30

## Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

### Leader's Context

This week, we continue to listen to Jesus speaking in parables. The reflection is focused on the shorter form of the Gospel reading. Since Jesus personally unpacks the meaning of this parable for his disciples in Matthew 13:36-43, it may be a good idea to read that portion aloud together with the teens, using their Bibles. Jesus identifies himself as the sower of good seed and the devil as the enemy that sowed weeds. Jesus underscores that God does not create evil but does allow it to exist in this world. We are encouraged to be patient with the presence of evil and trust that the goodness of God will ultimately prevail in the end. This is a good time to discuss divine providence and the scandal of evil; if God is all-good and all-powerful, how can evil exist?

**Q FOCUS:** God did not create evil; God allows it to exist and good will ultimately prevail.

### Liturgical Calendar Connection

On July 25, we celebrate the feast day of St. James, the apostle. He is sometimes called James the Greater so as to distinguish him from the "Lesser" author of the Letter of James and leader of the Church in Jerusalem. He was the brother of John and one of the three to witness Jesus' transfiguration. Acts of the Apostles (12:1-3) mentions his martyrdom. On July 26, we celebrate Sts. Anne and Joachim,

who are traditionally held to be the parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Although they are not mentioned in the Bible, stories about them have been handed down through history. Since they would be the grandparents of Jesus, Anne and Joachim are recognized as the patron saints of grandmothers and grandfathers.

### Church Teaching Connection

"Faced with the many tragic situations present in the world, Christians confess with humble trust that God alone can enable individuals and peoples to overcome evil and achieve good. . . . With his help, everyone can defeat evil with good. . . . Based on the certainty that evil will not prevail, Christians nourish an invincible hope which sustains their efforts to promote justice and peace, as well as firm confidence in the possibility of building a better world" (Pope John Paul II, World Day of Peace Message, 2005).

## Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

### Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

### Gospel

Matthew 13:24-30

**Reader:** A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

**All:** Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the Sign of the Cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

Jesus proposed another parable to the crowds, saying: "The kingdom of heaven may be likened to a man who sowed good seed in his field. While everyone was asleep his enemy came and sowed weeds all

through the wheat, and then went off. When the crop grew and bore fruit, the weeds appeared as well. The slaves of the householder came to him and said, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where have the weeds come from?' He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' His slaves said to him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' He replied, 'No, if you pull up the weeds you might uproot the wheat along with them. Let them grow together until harvest; then at harvest time I will say to the harvesters, "First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles for burning; but gather the wheat into my barn."'"

**Reader:** The Gospel of the Lord.

**All:** Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

*Everyone may be seated.*

## Reflect on the Word

*When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:*

Last week, we heard Jesus tell us the parable of the sower, we focused on our own receptivity to the seeds of God's Word. This week, Jesus adds a new layer for us to consider: the weeds. In the long version of this Gospel reading (not included in this session), the disciples ask Jesus to explain the meaning of this parable. The comparison made in this parable was such a literal, real-life problem that it was easy to lose his meaning. The word Jesus used for "weeds" wasn't a broad, general category. Rather, he had specifically named "darnel," a poisonous weed that looked just like wheat when it began to grow. It was so destructive that there was actually a Roman law in the first century that explicitly forbade sabotaging someone's crops by planting this weed. Naming darnel as the weed implied destructive evil committed intentionally with deception.

► What understanding (or questions) do you have about the goodness of God and the existence of evil?

In the parable, the goodness of the seed—all of God's creation—is underscored. We have understood that evil entered the world through the temptation of the devil and the free choice of Adam and Eve to turn away from God and be in the world on their own terms. God did not create evil but allows it to exist. Through their lived experience, everyone knew how difficult it was to remove the darnel without damaging the wheat. In order for us to have the freedom to choose between good and evil, both will remain until the final judgment. The faithful are encouraged to be patient and assured that the wicked will be punished in the end.

► How do you respond to those who have hurt you or those you love?

One thing to keep in mind is that throughout his ministry, Jesus does not shun sinners. Rather, he tells parable after parable about God's loving mercy and how God rejoices over every repentant sinner. To rip up the weeds with the wheat before "the harvest" (or the end of time) would deny the opportunity for conversion. Before his conversion, St. Paul persecuted Christians; would he be among the weeds ripped out? Good and evil coexist in our world, and if we are honest with ourselves, both weeds and wheat exist in our own hearts. Every day, in every area of life, we have a choice to cooperate with the grace of the Holy Spirit and bring about goodness, or cooperate with evil and cause others to sin.

► What aspect of today's parable do you find reassuring? What do you find most challenging?

## Wrapping It Up

*Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 226.*

**God did not create evil, but allows it to exist as weeds among wheat.**

**At the final judgment at the end of time, evildoers will be punished.**

**We are all sinners who are given the opportunity to repent and become like wheat, instead of weeds.**

# Act on the Word

## Explore the Catechism

For this activity, you will need copies of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, specifically paragraphs 302–314, for each participant.

Use the section of the *Catechism* on divine providence (paragraphs 302–314) to guide a discussion on the problem of evil. Begin by explaining what the *Catechism* is and how to use it: The *Catechism* is a collection of the fundamental truths about our faith, a collected work of the things we believe. It is organized into numbered paragraphs, with footnotes and cross-references. The footnotes provide source information, such as Scripture passages, theological writings of the early Church, the saints, and major Church documents that the teachings flow from. It is helpful to differentiate the page numbers (along the top), from the bold paragraph numbers, from the italicized cross references in the margins, from the footnote numbers superscript within each paragraph and appearing at the bottom of each page. Just like the universal way to reference Scripture is book-chapter-verse, when we reference the *Catechism*, we always use paragraph numbers (not page numbers) so that regardless of which printing you may be looking at, we know exactly which teaching to examine.

Begin by having everyone turn to paragraph 302, under the section entitled “God Carries Out His Plan: Divine Providence.” Once everyone has found the right place, work together as a large group to discuss the following questions.

- ❖ According to paragraph 302, what does “divine providence” mean? If God is good and God’s creation is good, why aren’t things perfect?
- ❖ In paragraphs 306–308, what is meant by “secondary causes”? Where can you see examples of this in real life?
- ❖ Which of the explanations provided in paragraphs 309–314 do you find most helpful? Why?
- ❖ How could this section of the *Catechism* help clarify the saying “everything happens for a reason”?

## Closing Prayer

*God of the earth,*

*you make the land fruitful.*

*You send the sun and rain to nourish the fruit  
of the earth.*

*You sent your Son to nourish us.*

*May the presence of Christ within us  
yield a harvest of justice and mercy.*

*Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity  
of the Holy Spirit,*

*God, for ever and ever.*

*Amen.*

## For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday’s Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at [www.ltp.org/lwgr](http://www.ltp.org/lwgr). Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.