

HOMILY

The Sixteenth Sunday of Ordinary time

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Last week we talked about planting seeds. This week we're talking about pulling weeds. The two go together. Every gardener knows that planting seeds is the easy part of having a successful garden. It is much more time consuming to weed the same garden.

Today, Jesus tells a story about weeds. Weeds that are not so much in an outside garden but closer to home in the garden of our souls. One day, the weeds will be thrown into the fiery furnace. The weeds are all the children of the evil one. There's good and bad in everyone. Where does God draw the line? Murderers? Rapists? Adulterers? Thieves? Does fibbing on our tax return count? How about gossiping, particularly if it borders on bearing false witness? How about the sins of omission? What about those who ignore their neighbor in need? How about those who only give a pittance to God after God has been so generous to them? Where is the line drawn?

Could it be that St. Paul was right when he said in Romans, "*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God?*" I don't know about you, but a fiery furnace doesn't appeal to me. And when the day comes when God begins pulling weeds, I certainly don't want to depend on my own virtue. We need to take today's lesson seriously. Pulling weeds is an important part of life.

There was an interesting report in the news recently. It was about an event designed for college kids. The purpose was to get them to take weeds seriously. One pundit called it "The World Series of Weeds" and "The Hula Bowl of Herbicides." Agricultural students from the U.S. and Canada competed in being able to identify weeds and to prescribe the right chemical to kill them. They needed to be able to recognize weeds when they are tiny. When weeds get big enough that anybody can recognize them, it's too late to do anything about them. That's an important insight. *When weeds get big enough that anybody can recognize them, it's too late to do anything about them.* How many parents have

been too late recognizing weeds growing in the life of their young person—weeds like drugs or depression or running with the wrong crowd? How many adults have recognized too late that vices like alcohol or gambling or some other addiction has them in its grasp? Or even more likely—negative attitudes like bitterness, resentment, bigotry. We need to talk about the weeds that crowd out the good that has been planted in our lives.

The people whose lives are being choked by these weeds are, for the most part, not bad people. They are good people who simply weren't vigilant about pulling the weeds. A few wrong turns. It happens in life. It happens to good people. A few bad judgments and suddenly you are lost, entangled, wrapped in the weeds, as a golfer might say. Sometimes, much is at stake—a marriage, your health, the safety of others. Pulling weeds is an important part of a successful life.

One other thought. God makes us mindful of the weeds growing in our lives so that God might deliver us from them. The last thing that God wants to do is to destroy us. Rather, he wants to enable us to identify the weeds and, with his help, remove them so that we can bloom and grow where we are planted.

God wants to restore us to the beautiful creation he intended from the first for us to be. God wants to restore the world as he created it to be, a world without pain or suffering or hatred or violence or greed. A world where people love and are loved without being used, without having their hearts and their lives broken because of the actions of others or by their own weaknesses. This is the world that God wants for all of us.

To be sure, we live in a broken world and we cannot expect things to be perfect in the world ever again. But we can make a start in that direction and we can do that today, this very hour, as we make our way to the table of the Lord, if we ask God to pull the weeds that may be growing in our hearts. You know which weeds are choking your spirit. Give them to God. Let God throw them into the fire and consume them forever. God is the master gardener of our lives. Let God put the garden of your life in perfect order again.