

Homily: 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2020

How well do you know the stories of the saints? Here's a list of saints who all have something in common. See if you can work it out: St Matthew, St Mary Magdalene, St Dismas (the so-called 'good thief' who was crucified alongside our Lord), St Paul, St Augustine, St Mary of Egypt, Blessed Charles de Foucauld... I could go on. Some names perhaps very familiar to you, some maybe less so. What they have in common is very simple – they are all saints who underwent a profound conversion after living sinful lives for quite some time. Their change of life is a sign of hope to us, not only because they show that change is possible, but even more so because they are testimony to the patience of God.

Today's Gospel speaks powerfully of the Lord's patience towards us. The image used by our Lord is of a good plant – wheat – and darnel, which was unwanted, sown by an enemy of the farmer in order to ruin his produce. Apparently this sort of thing was common enough that Roman law had specific sanctions against the sabotage of crops. The servants suggest pulling up the darnel and getting rid of the problem, but the farmer, in his wisdom, points out that to do so would also ruin the wheat, because the roots will be intertwined. The two must be allowed to grow side by side until the harvest.

It would be easy to think that this is simply a parable about good and bad people, and to ask ourselves "Why doesn't God just get rid of the bad people and the evil in our world?" But the truth is more complicated: our hearts are fields in which are sown seeds of love which bear fruit, hopefully, day in, day out. But because of our fallen nature there is also darnel in every human heart as well. Rather than destroying all traces of evil, then, God is patient, waiting until the harvest. His desire is never to destroy, but always to allow goodness to grow and to thrive, even when it means tolerating what is against His will. Seeing our failings, God is patient with us: He wants us to grow in grace, because He wants us to bear a rich harvest of faith and love for Him. Today's first reading expresses it beautifully: God has given us good hope, it says, because after sin He will grant repentance. How many of the saints know this! In one of his letters, St Peter – who knew very well the patience of Jesus – encourages us, "Think of the Lord's patience as your opportunity to be saved".

If God is patient with us, we must also be patient with ourselves. Perhaps sometimes we find ourselves frustrated by our repeated faults, our apparent inability to change. But how can we be impatient with ourselves when God is so patient with us? If we treat ourselves with less mercy than the Lord treats us, then we claim to be in some way better than Him! And, of course, we're not. So let's be patient, as He is patient – even with ourselves. The great bishop and spiritual writer St Francis de Sales wrote, "Patience is needed with everyone, but first of all with ourselves"; and, "The virtue of patience is the one which most assures us of perfection." Without patience, our goodness will never come to fruition.

Our patience must also extend to the situations we face in life which we would rather avoid. We all have sufferings, struggles, frustrations – for all of us, there are things in life

we'd love to change. Over the past few months we've been experiencing – and are still experiencing – an extended lesson in patience. We'd all love to be rid of the worries and the restrictions this pandemic has brought us, but the Lord teaches patience. Good will come from our endurance. Let's pray for this gift. And let's ask ourselves: where do I most need patience in my life? With myself, with family, friends, neighbours, the crosses I carry, the situations I must endure? Wherever we need it, let us ask the Lord to grant us this virtue in abundance. And, encouraged by today's readings, let's trust that, at the harvest, all that is darnel in our lives will be rooted out, and all that bears fruit for Him will be gathered into a rich and wonderful harvest.

Fr Andrew

