

Time in God's View

Smallness limits everything: vision, perspective, generosity, even our ability to forgive. We see the small picture and panic; God sees the whole picture and waits. We condemn and hurt each other because we are weak and scared; God is lenient and merciful because God is all-powerful. "...[A]nd with great forbearance you govern us; / for you have power to act whenever you choose."

God's actions give us insight into the divine heart, and the Scripture interprets those actions for us. God's example teaches us that "the upright must be kind." God fills us with hope, because he gives time for repentance, conversion and growth. When we are inclined to judge others, therefore, we should "meditate on his goodness"; when we feel guilty, we should "count on his mercy."

Jesus put this teaching into parables that teach us to include the dimension of *time* whenever we make judgments about people whether as individuals or as Church. Time is for growth. Only over a period of time can we see whether growth is taking place. Only after people have had time to grow and change can we make a final judgment about them. And only God knows when anyone's time is enough, which is one reason why only God can judge.

To teach us not to write off the power of God's grace working in the Church, or in groups or individuals within it (ourselves, the priests, the hierarchy), Jesus compares the Kingdom of God on earth to a field in which a farmer sowed good seed. But an enemy came and sowed weeds—literally "darnel," a plant that looks like wheat. When the farmer's overzealous servants heard of this, they wanted to go and root up the weeds, but the farmer told them there was no way to know

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16TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Wisdom 12:13, 16-19; Romans 8:26-27;
Matthew 13:24-43

whether a plant was weed or wheat until it matured. "Let both of them grow together until the harvest," he said. Only then could they tell which each one was.

We sometimes want to clean out all the "bad guys" in the Church—all except ourselves, of course. We may write off the older members because they are fixed in their ways and the young because they are not fixed in ours! We write ourselves off because we do not see within us any power to change that gives us hope. We write off the Church because we do not see anything happening to change things that need to be changed.

But we are small. We have very limited perception of both space and time. One thing we care about passionately can fill our whole screen. If we focus intensely on one problem, everything else goes out of focus. All time and space get reduced

to the here and now. If it is not happening now, and especially if it won't happen in our lifetime, it might as well not happen—as if history were not important once it ceases to affect our lives.

Jesus urges us to "look at the big picture, to get a wide-angle lens. The Church existed before you were born and will continue to exist after you are in heav-

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en. God has more time than you do; the game is not over for the Church when the clock stops for you. Do what you can while you are in the game, contribute all the points you can, but keep the big picture in mind. Do not reduce the universe to what you can see or all history to what takes place in your short span of time.”

When we write anyone off, we are just experiencing how small we are. We reduce a whole person to one fault; a whole life to one mistake, a whole group of people to one false value they accept. But God, who “searches the heart,” sees the Holy Spirit at work deep within each of us, helping us “in our weakness,” praying “with sighs too deep for words” for what we do not even know we desire. God sees the Church as a seed growing, leaven working, a woman in labor; God waits for “the whole Christ” to be born.

REFLECTING ON THIS WEEK'S GOSPELS

Sixteenth Week of the Year

***Pray daily:** Father, let the gift of your life continue to grow in us, drawing us from death to faith, hope and love. Keep us alive in Christ Jesus, watchful in prayer and true to his teaching until your glory is revealed in us. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Monday: Matthew 12:38-42. “The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah, and see, something greater than Jonah is here!” Are you constantly reconsidering your values and behavior as you grow in understanding of Jesus?

Tuesday: Matthew 12:46-50. “For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.” How do you treat Jesus as a brother? How could you?

Wednesday: Matthew 13:1-9. “Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.” What makes a person “good soil” for the word of God? Are you? What fruit shows in your life?

Thursday: Matthew 13:10-17. “Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.” In what ways are you using the Scriptures in order to understand Jesus better?

Friday: Matthew 13:18-23. “But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.” What does it take to understand Christ’s words? Which do you understand best? Least?

Saturday: Matthew 13:24-30. Jesus said, “No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them.” How often have you rejected someone instead of waiting for the person to change?

LIVING THIS WEEK'S GOSPELS

As Christian: Identify three influences from your environment that have led you into destructive behavior. Then find something in the example or teaching of Jesus that would counteract these influences.

As Disciple: Set aside a ten-minute period each day to let Christ sow the seed of his words in your mind.

As Prophet: Decide on one thing, large or small, in your lifestyle that you can change into something that bears positive witness to the values Jesus taught.

As Priest: Take one step this week to make your friends, family members or fellow parishioners into “good soil” for Jesus’ ideas to grow. For example, suggest a prayer before some common activity or start a discussion on some issue that involves attitudes and values.

As King: For one day, be alert to all the seeds sown in your mind from various sources, especially advertisements. Decide which seeds are good for your spiritual health and which are not. Take one step to clean up the environment, filtering out all harmful input to the senses.