

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

Fr. Samuel Springuel

19 July, 2026

1st Reading Wisdom 12:13,16–19

Responsorial Psalm Psalm 86:5–6,9–10,15–16

2nd Reading Romans 8:26–27

Gospel Matthew 13:24–43

Who is God? What kind of God do we worship? The answer matters, doesn't it? Who God is tells us a lot about what He wants from us and therefore what we should be doing. Anyone who reads fantasy fiction, and I read a lot of it, can point to examples of the worship of various fictional gods and how it is highly dependent on the kind of god they are. Followers of a god of healing treat the sick and injured. Followers of a god of war train and engage in combat. Followers of a god of nature spend lots of time outdoors and protect natural places. It's sort of an obvious thing for authors to do to give their made-up religions a more authentic feel. Even if they don't know it, they are channeling a real world concern into their fiction.

So, who is God? The psalmist today gives us a series of words and phrases to answer that question: good, forgiving, full of love, great, a do[er of] marvelous deeds, [one] of mercy and compassion, slow to anger, abounding in love and truth. Taken together they paint an image of God, and a fairly coherent one at that. Does it match our own image of God?

The psalmist's image points to a God who tolerates a lot of gray, a lot of dimness, shall we say. It's not as clean as black-and-white, not evenly divided into light and dark. That kind of division might be simple, but it's also rigid, prone to breaking. God, according to the psalmist, is merciful. He does not bend the bruised reed, but rather binds up the wounded and heals them. To a dim area, God brings another candle to brighten the space up a little bit more. To a patch of gray, he mixes in a bit more white. This is not a lack of standards. God knows what true white, true light, is and he is always working towards it. Rather it's a tolerance of lack in the materials, in us. We aren't perfect, yet, and that's okay. God's willing to work with that and walk us step-by-step towards perfection.

We're often uncomfortable with that. Clear decisions are much easier to deal with, even if we are on the "losing" side. But as Jesus tells us, God allows the wheat to grow amongst the weeds. We would rather get down on our hands and knees and start pulling weeds. The truly diabolical thing though, which is not mentioned in the parable, is that weeds are often grass, just like wheat. At many stages in their life cycle you'd be hard pressed to tell the difference and as any gardener knows, if you let inexperienced hands loose under those conditions, there is bound to be some collateral damage. If we do the weeding, then we are

bound to make mistakes and harm some wheat in the process. Furthermore, if you've ever looked at the roots of a grass, you know they are a tangled mess, intricately mixed up with those of the plants next to them. Even if we had God's perfect knowledge and could distinguish weeds from wheat without fail, pulling the weeds would mean damaging the roots of some of the wheat, and God will not tolerate even that. He does not instruct his workers to pull the weeds; denies them when they ask to do so. God wants *all* of his wheat to thrive, and if a few weeds do so in the process, that is a price he is willing to pay until it can be sorted out at the harvest.

But indeed, I think God's mercy goes further than that. It doesn't make sense in the context of the weeds and the wheat, but I think God's mercy extends to changing the weeds into wheat. Of course that isn't in the parable. Such a claim would be laughable in that context, but recall the parable of the yeast and the flour from later in the Gospel. A bit of yeast, mixed in with the flour (and some water) leavens the whole batch. What started out as a mixture of flour and yeast, clearly distinct like the weeds and the wheat, has become dough, a new thing, with a new identity which supplants both. Further, it is a contagious identity. Divide the dough up and mix each piece with more flour (and more water) and what do you get? More dough. And dough which is itself leavened just as the first batch was. We added no new yeast, we didn't start over. And yet the yeast is present in all the dough: leavening each batch as if we had. Better even, as any fan of sourdough can tell you.

This is the miracle of God's mercy. It's not clean, not black and white, light and dark. It's messy in a way that we may not always be comfortable with. A bit of gray, a bit of dimness, but an opportunity for change as well. We can become the wheat when we are the weeds. The price is the freedom to become the weeds when we are the wheat, and that's scary. We would much rather know what we are, where we stand, especially since, in our not-so-humble opinion, it's amongst the wheat. But that's not the way God works. He knows what we are, be it wheat or weeds, and loves us. He knows what we could become, and loves us even more.

So how do we follow the Lord's path? St Paul tells us, trust the Spirit. We don't know the way. We might think that at times, but we make mistakes and sometimes what we think is the way will only get us lost. The Spirit on the other hand, it knows the way. It can lead us out of the darkness into the light. It can bring another candle to shine in the dimness of our circumstances. All we need to do is entrust ourselves to a God who is good, forgiving, full of love, great, a do[er of] marvelous deeds, [one] of mercy and compassion, slow to anger, abounding in love and truth.