



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

16<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A

***False wheat***

*Readings: Wisdom 12: 13, 16-19, Ps 85, Romans 8: 26-27, Matthew 13: 24-43*

Not being farmers or botanists you may be unfamiliar with *Lolium Tementulum*. It is the Latin name of the plant to which Jesus refers in today's Gospel. In English it rejoices in several titles including 'cockle' and 'darnel'. Jesus uses it as a parabolic device to instruct the disciples about the mysteries of God, the end of salvation and the ultimate questions about the co-existence of good and evil in a world created by a good and loving and merciful God.

Jesus pictures the arable farmer sowing the seed of his wheat crop, upon whose success depends the very survival of his people. But, to his and our alarm, in the dead of night, under cover of darkness, the enemy has crept in and sowed Darnel in the same fields. The problem with darnel is twofold. First of all it is poisonous. Its Latin name reminds us of the state of delirious, reeling drunkenness that this poison effects. So it is not simply a nuisance but a hazard and a real danger to health and life itself. Hence it is sometimes called 'poison darnel'.

The second problem is that it also rejoices under the title 'false wheat'. This is because, until the very last stages of its growth, it is very hard to tell it

apart from the good harvest. Only when the ears appear, by which time it is well rooted and entangled in its hosts system, can one definitely tell. By this time it is really too late to go weeding it out without the consequent damage to the genuine crop. It is a cuckoo, a parasite, a lookalike, a dangerous deceit. Only by the time of near fruiting can most of us truly discern the problem. Darnel is the image of plausible evil. The sower of this havoc is Satan. The object of the attack is to poison man, to deceive and to destroy.

The serious farmer may be able to spot the enemy early but it is no good sending out labourers to cull the offending intruder because of the collateral damage.

So, Jesus says, both will grow together until the harvest. Then, and only then, will the differentiation take place. The brown eared golden wheat will be stored in the heavenly barns. The black eared toxic darnel will be consigned to the everlasting bonfire. This is the moment of judgement.

But this is not a simple parable of judgement - bad guys down, good guys up. Heaven remember is not full of good people but rather full of those who know their need of God and have repented and turned back to Him

So... the parable encompasses even those who are Heaven bound. Almost every one of us will die imperfect. Despite our best efforts and the generous grace of God there will be odd bits of Darnel in amongst the wheat. It will need to be weeded out.

This is where the Doctrine of Purgatory comes to our aid.

Unlike non-Catholics who, according to the guff ladled out at the Crem, go straight to Heaven, Catholics believe in the interim state. This is the state to which St Paul referred in 1 Corinthians Chapter 3. We may hae built in gold or silver or wood or straw but it will all be tested by fire - not the fire of Hell but the purifying fire of God's love. Even, St Paul says, if all our works turn out to be wood and straw and are consumed as so much rubbish, nevertheless we will be saved. The fire of judgement awaits the works of the enemy for absolute destruction and consignment to Hell. The shabby efforts of the struggling faithful may not endure the glorious examination of the fire of God's love but the painstakingly purified faithful, who know their need of God, will be bound for the barns of the kingdom and their translation into the likeness of the Bread of Life, which is Christ.