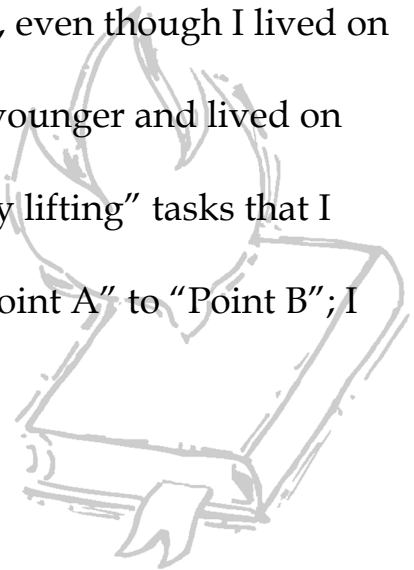


Homily
16th Sunday OT - A
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
July 18-19, 2020

Wis 12: 13, 16-19
Ps 86: 5-6, 9-10, 15-16
Rm 8: 26-27
Mt 13: 24-43

I loathe sauerkraut!!! Even though I am Polish and sauerkraut is connected to your average Pole as Pasta is to an Italian or tamales are to Latin Americans, I have never been able to connect myself to this particular delicacy of the old country (in the same vein, I also choose to have no affiliation with *Czernina*, or duck blood soup - another delicacy of the Polish race). Thus, when I came to find out last week that the cabbage in my father's garden has begun to rot, I was not lamenting for nights on end.

To be honest with you, the life of gardening and Father Pete Jankowski have never really gone hand-in-hand, even though I lived on a farm during my formative years. When I was younger and lived on the farm, my father used to assign me the "heavy lifting" tasks that I enjoyed doing. I moved boxes and bags from "Point A" to "Point B"; I



would clean the sheep pen and make sure the animals were well-fed and watered. What I lacked on the farm was the ability to perform the more delicate tasks. For instance, I could not garden. I could not tell the difference between the weed and the plant, and often pulled out one when I was supposed to pull out the other. After awhile, my father realized my shortcomings in the vegetable patch and relegated me to the tasks of life that I was able to accomplish.

To be honest with you, I cannot stand cabbage in any its forms, in the same way that the former President Bush used to loathe eating any form of broccoli in his life. Practically each week when I stop by my father's house for dinner, his wife serves sauerkraut with everything on the table; I loathe it. Whenever I go to a picnic, I avoid coleslaw at all costs; I loathe it. On March 17th each year, I guarantee you that if some Irish person placed corned beef and cabbage in front of me for my meal, I would only eat half of what was on the plate. Whenever I read "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" at get to the part where the family is relegated to eat cabbage soup during their times of trial, I pray to the

good Lord that if I am the last person on earth and I am forced to eat just one type of food, that cabbage not be that food.

So, when I read today's gospel from the 13th Chapter of Matthew, I found some comfort in the words that were spoken - let the weeds grow with the wheat and on the last day the weeds and the wheat will be separated. I like that idea - leave the delicate work until the end and relegate my faith life to the tasks of heavy lifting. The problem for me, though, is that this reading kind of contradicts the text from the early portion of Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 13, the early portion of the text that we read from last week's gospel. In that text, our Lord lectures us that the soil upon which the farmer lays his seed must be rich and fertile in order for the seed to take root. Last week, I preached how the land on which we work, the faith in which we live, must be well cultivated and cared for in order that the seed find a suitable growing place, a place that is ready and receptive for the rain and grace that our Lord showers upon us each moment in our lives. So, which is it - should we prepare our land well and make our faith lives receptive to the grace of God or

should we allow the weeds and sin and evils of the world grow around us and let God take care of separating both at the end?

Some biblical scholars contend that the portion of Matthew's Gospel that we read today may very well have been inspired by the faithful that lived in the time after Christ's death and were trying to reconcile their lives of faith with the evils of the world that surrounded them. This view is supported by the words of the first reading from Wisdom, which states that a loving and forgiving God will pardon the sins of the faithful believer, will cleanse them of the wrongs they may have done and will remove them from these stains of sin to live in a symbolic garden without the weeds of temptation.

That all said, I came across a quotation from St. Augustine some 1600 years or so ago that gives perspective to our reading today that may not settle well with the folks of today's age. As our society moves more and more away from the teachings of the divine into the preferences of the secular, St. Augustine offers a stark perspective on our faith lives on

earth and does not mince words concerning the way we must live in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. Augustine writes...

AUGUSTINE, Liber Unus Quaest. XVII in Matt. II:

He says: While men sleep; for when the pastors of the Church are negligent, or when the Apostles succumbed to the sleep of death, the devil came and oversowed those whom the Lord later interprets as signifying *the children of the wicked one*. But it may be asked if these are the heretics, or those Catholics who live wickedly? But since He says they were sown among the wheat they appear to be here meant who are all of one communion. Yet since the Lord Himself interpreted the field as meaning, not the Church, but the world, they are more correctly interpreted as signifying the heretics who in this world are mingled with the good, so that the wicked who also dwell in the bosom of the Church are rather more like straw than tares; because the straw has the same root and stalk as wheat.

Él dice: Mientras los hombres duermen; porque cuando los pastores de la Iglesia son negligentes, o cuando los Apóstoles sucumben al sueño de la muerte, el diablo vino y superó a aquellos que el Señor luego interpreta como los hijos del inicuo. Pero se puede preguntar si estos son los herejes, o esos católicos que viven malvadamente. Pero dado que Él dice que se sembraron entre el trigo, parecen estar aquí, quienes son todos de una comunión. Sin embargo, dado que el Señor mismo interpretó el campo como significado, no la Iglesia, sino el mundo, se interpretan más correctamente como significando a los herejes que en este mundo se mezclan con el bien, de modo que los malvados que también habitan en el seno de la iglesia son más como paja que cizaña; porque la paja tiene la misma raíz y tallo que el trigo.

Especially these last few weeks and months after encountering what we have in our society, for someone like Augustine to give us a blunt assessment of the ways that this world lives will not go down well with anyone, even those of the faith. Yet, sometimes we all need a reality check in life and have our lives put in perspective if we ever want to live with God for the rest of our existence. The world prefers to live one way – God prefers us to live another. The metaphorical weeds of our society are determined to choke the wheat that is grown; to remain strong in the faith, we are challenged to grow and be nurtured despite the evils that grow around us. The temptations of sin are strong – the weeds often seem stronger than the wheat. Yet, we are called to persevere; we are called to live like Christ.

In reflecting on these passages from the last two weeks, I can only conclude that we must accept the fact that we live in what I call a “both and” society. We must accept the fact that the faith life we keep must be well-prepared to receive the graces of God and that the world of sin is

probably growing all around us as we speak. We must accept the fact that the only ground that we are able to control fully is that of our own faith lives. We have the ability to prepare our faith lives to receive God, even though the people around us may reject the faith and may very well tempt us to do the same.

We also must accept the fact that we can only do so much for the sake of others in the world, that we are challenged by our Lord to try and make this world a safe place for others, but we do not have the ability to force others to make their faith lives as rich as ours strives to be. Many times in the confessional, the faithful have lamented how their good works seem in vain, how they try to instill the faith on the members of their families, only to see the members of their families turn away from that faith in order to walk their own path.

To this, we must be resigned to knowing that the consequences of a free will and original sin are the consequences of people choosing whether to follow good or evil. As a human race, we chose to understand this difference the hard way in the Garden of Eden and as a

result, our eyes have become open to the full force of evil in our lives. Each one of us has the choice to turn away from sin and believe in the gospel. But we are not robots – we cannot force others to follow our path. Each person in this world must make the choice to make their faith lives rich to receive the Word of God or to allow their faith lives to grow barren or hard or full of thorns or weeds. In the end, each one of us will be accountable for our individual actions – it is God who will remove the wheat from the weeds, the faithful from the sinners.

On our part, we have the honor and obligation to pray for those who need our prayers. We have the obligation to take care of our own faith lives so that our own faith lives are not corrupted. And at Mass and in our own private lives of prayer, we are challenged to pray for the needs of the world and the needs within our families, to allow God to afford the people around us the same grace that he rains on us each day.

May we prepare our faith lives well, may we allow ourselves to receive God's graces and may we assist and pray for those who need this same grace that showers our lives every day. This is our prayer.