

A reading from the book of Wisdom.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

There is no god besides you, Lord,
whose care is for all people,
to whom you should prove that you have not judged unjustly.
For your strength is the source of righteousness,
and your power over all causes you to spare all.
For you show your strength
when people doubt the completeness of your power,
and you rebuke any insolence among those who know it.
Although you are sovereign in strength,
you judge with mildness,
and with great forbearance you govern us;
for you have power to act whenever you choose.
Through such works you have taught your people
that the righteous must be kind,
and you have filled your children with good hope,
because you give repentance for sins.

Pause for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING – A 16

A reading from the letter of Saint Paul to the Romans.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Brothers and sisters:
The Spirit helps us in our weakness;
for we do not know how to pray as we ought,
but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.
And God, who searches the heart,
knows what is the mind of the Spirit,
because the Spirit intercedes for the saints
according to the will of God.

PAUSE for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – A 16

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit.

A reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord

Jesus put before the crowds a parable:

“The kingdom of heaven may be compared
to someone who sowed good seed in his field;
but while everybody was asleep,
an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away.

So when the plants came up and bore grain,
then the weeds appeared as well.

And the slaves of the householder came and said to him,
‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field?’

Where, then, did these weeds come from?’

He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’

The slaves said to him,

‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’

But he replied, ‘No;

for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them.

Let both of them grow together until the harvest;
and at harvest time I will tell the reapers,
Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned,
but gather the wheat into my barn.”

Jesus put before them another parable:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed
that someone took and sowed in his field;
it is the smallest of all the seeds,
but when it has grown
it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree,
so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

He told them another parable:

“The kingdom of heaven is like yeast
that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour
until all of it was leavened.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

Reading I: Wisdom 12:13, 16-19

The caption to this passage highlights the idea of repentance.

From the parables in today's gospel, however, it appears that the real reason for the choice of this passage was to reinforce the notion of God's forbearance: "Although you are sovereign in strength, you judge with mildness, and with great forbearance you govern us" (Wis 12:18).

God's care, it says, is for all people, and even for the tares among the wheat. "Your sovereignty over all causes you to spare all" (Wis 12:16).

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

This psalm of individual lament is remarkable for its confidence in the faithfulness and steadfast love of YHWH, a confidence unshaken by present distress.

If God's forbearance is the main theme of this day, this is a highly suitable psalm to go with the Old Testament reading and the gospel.

Reading II: Romans 8:26-27

We note that two verses (Rom 8:24-25) have been omitted between the end of last week's reading from Romans and the beginning of today's selection. This is because verse 26 picks up from verse 23.

The inward groaning of those who possess the first fruits of the Spirit is assisted by the Spirit, who intercedes for us "with sighs too deep for words" (Rom 8:26; the word for "sighs" is akin to "groanings").

Herein lies the clue to Paul's meaning. It is not that the speech of the Holy Spirit is in itself encompassed with infirmity and therefore itself groans or sighs in an unintelligible fashion (in glossolalia, for instance); rather, Paul's thought is that the Spirit condescends to take up our infirm prayers and to bear them up to God and to present them before God in the form of intelligible speech.

Here the Spirit acts as a Paraclete or Advocate, as in the Fourth Gospel, although Paul does not actually use the word.

We habitually think of prayer in terms of "me down here" speaking to "God up there." But when I pray as a believer, it is not just "me down here"—it is the Spirit of God within me praying to "God up there."

Thus, immanence and transcendence are both acted out in the activity of prayer. Thus, too, prayer is an activity in which the believer participates in the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

Gospel: Matthew 13:24-43

We continue today with another parable from Matthew 13. Like the parable of the sower, the parable of the tares has undergone allegorization, and once again the short form gives the non-allegorized version that is very probably close to the form in which Jesus originally spoke it.

There is a further similarity: in the long form, the parable and its allegorical interpretation are separated by other materials. In this case, the intervening material consists of two parables found elsewhere in the gospel tradition, namely, the parable of the mustard seed, which occurs in Mark and Q (Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19); and the parable of the leaven, which is found in Q (par. Luke 13:20-21).

These little parables are followed by a shortened form of Mark's conclusion to the parables (Matthew 13:34-35; par. Mark 4:33-34) and a fulfillment citation from Psalm 78:2, which is both unique to and typical of Matthew.

We thus once more have three levels in the tradition: (1) the parable of the tares, substantially as told by Jesus; (2) the parable of the tares with its allegorical interpretation; (3) the insertion of the complex of other materials between the parable and its interpretation, and the shift of the latter from a public to a private location. The meaning of each of these levels may be constructed as follows:

(1) Jesus is criticized by his purist contemporaries for inviting the outcast to eat with him as an anticipation of God's salvation. He answers by saying that it is for God to make the separation and that God will do so only at the end. Then it will be clear who are the wheat and who are the tares. Doubtless there will be some surprises in store.

(2) The allegorical interpretation applies the parable to the Christian community. There are tares as well as wheat in the church now. The church is a *corpus permixtum*, and there need be no premature attempt to separate the wheat from the tares in its present life.

(3) By sandwiching the intervening material between the parable and its interpretation, and especially by shifting the scene from public to private teaching just before the interpretation, Matthew has applied this complex of material to the situation of his own church.

As we saw last week, that situation is marked by disappointment over the failure of the mission to Israel.

Now the church is assured that when the gospel came to Israel, it came as a parable, a mashal, a riddle (Psalm 78:2). Only the church comprehends the riddle. The tares are presently indistinguishable from the wheat, but at the end God will separate them. The church must meanwhile be patient.

There is a remarkable amount of continuity between the three interpretations—more so than in the case of the sower. At each level the point remains the forbearance of God. What changes is the identity of the wheat and the tares.

For Jesus, it was the outcast and the authorities of his people. For the church tradition, it was the good and the bad within the Christian community. For the evangelist, it was non-believing Israel and the members of his church.

Reginald H. Fuller