

*"They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth."* Yeah. Get 'em. Smash them down. Silence them. Kick them out. There is a certain sentiment like that in our own and other countries which seems to have surfaced in recent years and continues to grow. It is a harsh, complaining, know-it-all sort of mentality that shows no tolerance for differing opinions or life experiences. Just throw "them" into the fiery furnace. After all, Jesus says it himself! But we know there are at least two flaws in that approach:

First, it is God who will do the judging, not human beings and second, Jesus is talking about the *"end of the age"* when it is to happen. In fact, the householder in Jesus' story who sowed the good seed, is concerned that the people might act too soon and pull up the weeds with the wheat. Unless you're God, it can be hard to tell the difference - especially in the beginning.

Now we do have to discern about what brings forth the good and what brings forth the bad because we have to make decisions about how we are to live, how we are to care for one another, how we are to govern and be governed. A crucial part of that decision-making requires dialogue - listening to each other and speaking honestly and respectfully, no matter how much power or education or money one has or does not have. Sometimes it appears that we have completely lost that concept and it has given way to just plain meanness in the way people speak to each other or about each other.

Our first reading from the Book of Wisdom tells us that even God, who has the *"care of all"* and *can judge hearts* and whose *"might is the source of justice - yet God's mastery over all things makes God lenient to all"*, not destructive. It goes on to say that by God's very deeds we are taught that *"those who are just must be kind."*

When I was in Jerusalem last year, our tour guide, a very bright, young Christian man, took us along the wall of the old city and as

we walked he stopped us for a second and ran over to a patch of growth that looked like tall weeds. He ran his hand up and down the stalks and then came back to us and said, "Open your hand". And as I did he shook his hand over mine and poured out these tiny specks that could fit into the *creases* in my hand. "Those", he said, "are mustard seeds." The tiniest of the seeds that can make room for all - that is God's handiwork! No wonder Jesus used that example.

The Book of Wisdom points out that we have "*good ground for hope*" because God gives us "*space for repentance*." And St. Paul says, "*the Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness*." We who are in constant need of forgiveness and a second or third or 100th chance, are also called to imitate the very Spirit of God that fills us. For as we interact with others, we may not know when we are crushing weeds or when we are crushing wheat.

I have a cartoon of heaven on my wall. There is a large sign that says "Welcome to Heaven" and it spans two large, open gateways, one next to the other. There is a plaque on the wall in between the gateways. On the plaque there is an arrow pointing this way that reads, "RIGHT RELIGION ENTRANCE" and there is a long line of people entering. And there is another arrow pointing the other way that reads, "WRONG RELIGION ENTRANCE". There is nobody in that gateway at all. And there are two angels sitting watching and one says to the other, "The funny thing is, none of them ever get the joke." Missing the humor, they all presumed their "rightness".

May we be more often wheat than weeds. May we trust the Spirit to guide us and may we leave the judgment to God.