

16th Sunday, Ordinary time, Year A. (Wisdom 12:13.16-19; Rom 8:26-27; Mt 13:24-43)

Introduction: The readings of today teach us that mercy and leniency are expressions not of weakness but of strength. The definitive separation of the good and the bad must be left to the last judgment.

Homily

With regards to sinners and sin, there have always been two views in the Church –one exclusive, the other inclusive. The exclusive view holds that the Church is for good people, for the fully committed. In the inclusive view, the church must be open to all, to the hot, the cold, the lukewarm, to saints and sinners. For some, the presence of sinners in the church is a cause of scandal. For people in this shade of opinion, church men and women should not do wrong at all. The issue of sinners in the church was a big one for the early church as well. At some stage, the church used inquisition, excommunication and other strict measures to weed out sinners and defaulters. Later, the church became more lenient, tolerant and merciful to her erring children. They learnt from the example of Jesus who loved and guided sinners and errant audience.

We have a natural tendency to divide people into two categories: saints and sinners. However, this division is quite unreal. People are not so easily categorized. Human beings are very complex, and we find things that are at odds with one another existing in each and one same individual.

I find the story of the German Oskar Schindler quite interesting in this regard. Oskar was a German industrialist who saved over one thousand polish Jews from the concentration camps during the Nazi human holocaust. One of the people he saved said of him, “he was our father, our mother, our only hope. He never let us down”. Yet those who saw the film, ‘Schindler’s list’ were surprised, if not quite put off, by his vices. He was a man endowed with all the human vices. Hence, he constitutes a moral puzzle.

Schindler certainly was not a saint. In fact, he was riddled with contradictions. Unfaithful to his wife, he certainly knew how to enjoy the so called good life –drinks, women, food, parties, delicacies, etc. He was a catholic but not a practicing one. He was a member of the Nazi party and his avowed aim was to end the war with two trunks full of money. He allegedly exploited the Jews as a source of cheap labor.

But there was another and better side of him. He was lenient, merciful and selfless. In spite of his lapses, he always returned to this better side. There was basic goodness about him. As the war went on, he was appalled at the horrors of what came to be referred to as 'the final solution'. At a considerable and sometimes very grave personal risk, he protected the Jews from the death camps and from being arrested by the Nazi. He showed he was a merciful and courageous man. As already demonstrated, Schindler was no angel, but he was a mixture of good and evil. There was a basic goodness about him.

Sometimes, we have difficulties understanding the divided nature of human beings. There is a co-existence in each and every human being of good and evil, strength and weakness, loyalty and betrayal. We want our hero to be without sin, irreproachable, without any guile, spotless. As soon as any flaw is noticed, we tend to dismiss and dump that fellow.

The Lord invites us today to be lenient and hospitable towards all that we have and are. We should also show forth these virtues towards one another. We shall be judged not by a single act or stage in life but our whole lives. One may make a great mistake in life but may in the course of life, redeem him or herself. A lot of that takes place in life. God makes saints from flawed creatures. Anthony de Mello says "attempts to hide the streakiness of our holy people, though sometimes successful, are always dishonest". Our Church is big and loving enough to hold its sinful children in her fold. We are invited to try to be as tolerant and understanding. While condemning sins and evil, we should try to love the sinner. Change does not come all too easily. For animals and plants, it is instinctive, but for humans it takes long, rigorous, painful, boring, and sometimes very exhausting process.