

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Cycle A, 2017
Church of St. Joan of Arc, Marlton NJ

Weed Killer or Fertilizer?

I'm not so sure my mother would like today's parable. She's always had a flower garden, and she has spent much of her life ... pulling weeds.

Jesus comes along and says, "Let 'em go." He seems to be saying: if you focus on the weeds, you may do damage to the wheat.

Here's an historical example: Yesterday the Church celebrated the Feast of St. Mary Magdalene.

Mary of Magdala. Mary Magdalene. You know: the most notorious "bad woman" in the Bible, the woman of ill repute. The one whom the movies like to portray as a temptress. Scandal follows her around; followed her, in fact, for centuries.

But why? The Gospels do not say she was a prostitute. The Gospels do not say she was a temptress. The Gospels do not say she was the woman

caught in adultery. The Gospels say nothing of her sex life.

The Gospels do tell us Jesus healed her of 7 demons she had within her.

The Gospels tell us she followed Jesus.

The Gospels tell us she was at the foot of the cross when Jesus was crucified. There with his mother and the disciple, John. No others.

The Gospels tell us she was there at the tomb on what we now call Easter morning. The Gospels tell us she was the first person Jesus spoke to after his resurrection. The Gospels tell us she was the first to announce that Jesus is alive. "I have seen the Lord," she told the apostles who were still hiding in fear.

But those 7 demons! We haven't forgotten. They have followed her around for 2000 years. Those 7 weeds have choked out any goodness she did. Even though the Church named her a saint, even though St. Thomas Aquinas called her "the apostle to the

Apostles," even though that, artists, movie makers, and even the Church has focused on her weeds and in the process killed the wheat.

How many times have I done that? How many times have I focused on someone's weeds and let them know about it? Thank God I am not the judge at the end of the world. Thank God you're not. Thank God, God is!

I learned from going to Al-Anon that it does no good whatsoever to tell the alcoholic how bad he or she is, or how weak he is, or "why can't you change," or "what's wrong with you," or "don't you know what you're doing to yourself and to your family"?

The alcoholic, the person addicted, the person depressed: they already think of themselves as wrong, weak, sinful, a weed.

How many times have we done it to ourselves? Focused on the weeds in our life? What's bad ... what's wrong ... the sins ... the mistakes. How many times have we said to

ourselves, "I'm not good enough"?

Jesus isn't giving gardening tips. Jesus is talking about the Kingdom of God. Jesus is talking about the nature of God's love and mercy.

Last year, Pope Francis gave Mary Magdalen's feast day same importance as the feast days of the Apostles. He was sending a message.

The Church isn't here just to be a weed-killer. Unfortunately, that is how many young people perceive us. We are the ones who point out everyone's sins while not even looking at our own – which is the definition of hypocrisy.

The Church must be fertilizer for the human race ... sowing love and mercy, helping goodness and peace and reconciliation to grow.

Jesus has spoken. Jesus has told us what kind of "gardener" God is. It's clear what kind of "gardeners" he wants to make of us.