

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time: July 19, 2020

St. Vincent de Paul Church, Baltimore

A Reflection on the Parable of Weeds among the Wheat

Weeds are the bane of my existence in my garden. No matter how hard I try to pull them up or smother them with mulch, weeds such as morning glory vines, English ivy, dandelions and wild grape still return every season, poking their invasive, maddeningly aggressive shoots up, climbing and wrapping themselves around my more desirous raspberry bushes. They strangle other plants and take over my yard. No matter what I do, insidious and invasive poison ivy weeds constantly come back; it is a never-ending battle that I can never win. Perhaps we need to stop fighting the weeds but instead accept that they will always be intertwined with our good plants. Everyone has a shadow or dark side. It is a metaphor for us, that we have a fruitful (or wheat) side and a menacing (or weed) side. Beneath the good and beautiful wheat, lies a weed, that invades and disturbs the wheat's peaceful existence. These two entities are forever present in all living things. We need to acknowledge that the weeds will always be with us; we can never be fully rid of them.

Weeds can also be a metaphor for racism. As a nurse, I am a direct witness of how COVID-19 is sadly affecting African Americans disproportionately in America. We can no longer ignore the unfair health care disparities of the Black people, whose health has suffered after centuries of inadequate and unjust treatment, stemming from forced slavery, poverty and mass incarceration. In 1992 when I lived in Seattle, WA, I remember marching in a peaceful protest against police brutality after Rodney King's beating. One slogan was "LAPD, where they treat you like a KING!" - a play on words of Rodney's last name. Ironically, MLK and Rodney King both share the same last name. Here we are in 2020, and we're still wondering when we shall overcome some day? Why are Blacks being killed violently and without regard by corrupt police, who instead of protecting us are feared by us? Black lives matter. Black folks are more vulnerable because from the get-go, they are at a disadvantage. In America, if you are born Black, your struggle is so much harder than non-Blacks due to systemic inequities. The shadow side is

the bias that we have against Blacks. It occurs sometimes as blatant racism (large, in-your face dandelion weeds with deep tap roots) like when Amy Cooper falsely placed a 911 call on an innocent Black man (Christian Cooper) in Central Park. While other times, the weeds are like tiny clover weeds of microaggressions present when making comments like “You speak so well for a Black man,” implying that Blacks aren’t as articulate as whites. But all racism is hurtful whether it is a lynching or a snide remark.

Furthermore, we can also look at weeds as a metaphor for perseverance. Some weeds, like Purslane, are good weeds and produce pretty yellow flowers. It’s always amazing to see how the common Purslane weed can manage to grow through a tiny crack in the concrete. Purslane reminds me of the Black struggle. Like Purslane, which can grow in poor conditions with little soil or without nutrients, the Black people, who despite having the disadvantages of slavery and poverty, still have the desire to reach for the sunlight and survive. Blacks are beautiful, strong and resilient. We need to value all people regardless of their backgrounds. We need to acknowledge our own biases and admit that we have contributed to their collective hurts by our silence. We can no longer ignore the cries of the Black community. We will never be able to get rid our gardens of weeds but we can appreciate the lessons that some weeds like Purslane can teach us about perseverance and worth.

Though it’s a constant struggle, I’m beginning to have better control over and appreciation for weeds in my garden. I feel connected to the Earth as I delicately pull out the weeds while not harming the “wheat.” By understanding our own biases and standing in solidarity with our Black brothers and sisters, hopefully, we’ll be able to lessen the damage of racism, leading to a more harmonious garden/world.

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