

LET BOTH GROW TOGETHER UNTIL THE HARVEST - Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Matthew 13,24-43

He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds? He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, "Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn."

He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants 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 leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened."

All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet: "I will open my mouth in parables;

I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world."

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

In Matthew's gospel not only are Jesus' temptations that he suffered presented, but also the possible temptations of the community of believers of all times. In chapter 13, we find three parables, with the replies to the three possible temptations: they are the parables of the Kingdom. It is Jesus that speaks to his disciples, he presents these parables of the Kingdom of Heaven. Remember that this expression is typical of Matthew, but means the Kingdom of God, being the alternative society where instead of accumulating for oneself, one shares generously with others, where instead of commanding there is serving, instead of advancing there is humility. This is the Kingdom of Heaven.

The first temptation to which the community is always subjected to, is the temptation to be a community of elite, a community of superior people and therefore tending to eliminate others. To this temptation Jesus replies with a parable, that of the sower and the weeds. Jesus says "...while his men were sleeping, his enemy came.." the Lord's enemies "... and sowed weeds..." weeds are toxic seeds, there are narcotic,

"..among the wheat.." But the servants are more toxic than the weeds. In fact *"..the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds.... do you want us to go and gather them?'"* And in the parable the owner of the field prevents them, saying *"No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them."* Their action, that of zealous servants, is more dangerous than weeds. So Jesus says no to a community of only elite, this is the temptation that happens often in ecclesial groups, in which everyone has the right answer to the way of living Jesus' message, and for this they snub or affect the lives of others. Jesus is not in agreement with this, therefore no to the temptation to be an elite community.

The second temptation that the community suffers, we see it in all the gospels, is that of the mania of greatness. So Jesus continues, saying another parable : *"The kingdom of heaven is like..."* To understand this parable it is necessary to refer to the Prophet Ezekiel , in chapter 17, referring to a future imaginative Kingdom, saying that the Kingdom is like a cedar tree, called the king of trees that is planted in high mountains. Therefore something extraordinary, something that catches the eye, and is admired for its splendour. Jesus says nothing like this *" The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took.. "* it is strange that Jesus talks of sowing, because the mustard does not need sowing, *"...and sowed in his field."* *"It is the smallest of all seeds,"* the mustard is a weed; its seed that are tiny, arrive everywhere with the wind, so there is no need for sowing and it is feared by Palestinians. So, it is tiny, but arrives everywhere: this is Jesus' message: *"It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants..."* what does Jesus mean ? That the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of God, even in its moment of great splendour, does not attract attention; the mustard plant is a tree that in certain zones, like the Sea of Galilee, grows to 2 to 3 meters, but it is a common plant that does not attract attention. Well, for Jesus the Kingdom of God, in its moment of great growth, does not attract attention for its greatness, for the magnificence, but like a weed, will arrive everywhere.

The third and last temptation is that of discouragement. The Christian community is small, there is a lot of work and there is the risk of discouragement. So Jesus, for this temptation, tells another parable: *The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour,..."* three measure of flour are forty kilos, a bit too much for a normal domestic home. Why this forty kilos? Because in the Old Testament, this quantity appears in the episode of Abraham and Sarah, the mother of the prophet Samuel, always in the occasion of God's promises to the people, even in circumstances that seem impossible. *Then he says: "... till it was all leavened."* The Christian community should not be frightened of the enormity of work, but must mix with existing reality and then transform it, and Jesus guarantees it.

Well, of the three parables, the only one that the disciples ask to be explained is the first not that they have not understood but they are not in agreement. In fact *".. he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field."* So this parable in which Jesus denies the temptation to be a community of elect, a community of superiors over others, is not accepted by the community of disciples. Well, Jesus explains, in the rest of the parable, that they are individuals who judge themselves by choosing what to be: either to be grain, bread that nourishes, blessing others, or to be weeds, a toxic poison that brings death. So three temptations to which the communities of all times can be subjected, but with certainty and assurance, that the message of Jesus will be accomplished despite everything, despite the limited time.