

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In last week's second reading of St. Paul to the Romans, he expressed that "all creation is groaning in labor pains." In today's second reading, St. Paul tells us that the "Spirit himself intercedes with inexpressible groanings." This intercession refers to our human condition of weakness and shortcomings and our desire, however fragile, to pray. These are words of great hope as St. Paul articulates a reality we know ourselves but don't always consciously articulate: that God knows our hearts and our sincere desire to be more closely united with him.

The Holy Spirit, the Advocate, infuses us with the grace to attain what we cannot do on our own. The "inexpressible groanings" of which St. Paul speaks is the fire of desire we saw in the disciples and their companions at Pentecost: the transformative experience of grace allowed them to no longer hide and be afraid. They became bold in their proclamation of the Gospel because they came to realize that their power came not of their own volition but rather from God's will for them.

In *With God in America: the Spiritual Legacy of an Unlikely Jesuit*, about the life of Venerable Walter J. Ciszek, S.J., the American Jesuit who lived under Soviet imprisonment and house arrest for twenty-three years, offers these timely insights. When Father Ciszek was released by the Soviets in 1963, he dedicated the rest of his life (he died in 1984) to the pastoral care of the Byzantine Russian community, his Jesuit brothers and local parish priests, and directed many retreats for religious and laity alike. Sister Andreja Vladia recounted some salient and significant points Father had made during a retreat for a group of nuns at their monastery.

"These seem to be the two points best remembered from his conferences and retreats: our weakness and God's strong love. If you are in a situation or difficulty, you can make a U-turn; instead of putting the blame on something outside or on someone else, look within yourself to see how you have contributed to the problem, and then find a way to restore peace to the situation. When she was having serious doubts about her vocation, shortly before taking the veil, Father Walter saw that she was troubled and asked whether this was really what she wanted. She replied that she was worried because she wasn't sure that it was what God wanted. He answered, 'You couldn't want something so good on your own, so of course God wants it. He wanted it first for you.' That taught me a lesson, she concluded, and went on to say, 'We must remember that when we want something noble and good, it is God's grace making us desire it. On our own, we are incapable of wanting anything noble and good.'"

Today's Gospel from St. Matthew continues what is often referred to as the "parable or parabolic discourse". In it, Jesus uses several images in which to explain the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus uses earthy imagery in order that his listeners can capture what he is saying in terms that are not abstract nor outside their grasp. He speaks to them of the sowing of good seed in the field and the mustard seed. When alone with his disciples after speaking with the crowds, they ask him to explain the imagery expressed in the parables. He responds, "He who sows good seed is the Son of Man, the field is the world, the good seed the children of the kingdom. The weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are the angels."

Jesus is very explicit in explaining the juxtaposition of the good and bad seed; the good wheat mixed in among the weeds. He explains the reality of evil in the world. It is interesting in conversations to bring up the term "evil." People tend to wince when hearing this term, even Christians and Catholics. There is great danger in dismissing the existence of evil and one who is so contrary to Christ himself. When we obscure the distinction between good and evil, everything becomes relative, especially within the moral sphere. The parables are a very emphatic and explicit way of reminding us as Christians of how important it is to grow good seed amidst a chaotic and confusing world.

I would ask that we continue to pray for our seminarians, those discerning a call to priesthood and religious life, and for an increase in vocations to the priesthood and religious life. St. Pius is privileged and blessed to be hosting all of the ordinations for the Archdiocese this year: Ordinations to the Priesthood on Saturday, August 1st (Br. Ian will be ordained); Ordinations to the Transitional Diaconate on Saturday, August 8th (Br. John will be ordained) and Ordinations to the Permanent Diaconate on Saturday, August 15th. Please pray for our brothers who will be ordained, their families, and for all of those who have inspired them along their vocation journey.

Fr. Tom