

Wheat and Weeds and Watchfulness

This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.



On July 19th we read a parable that Christ told, recorded in **Matthew 13: 24-30**. Christ compares the kingdom of heaven to a field planted with good seed.

The man who plants the seed, though, has an enemy, and "while men are sleeping" the enemy comes and sows weeds among the planted wheat. Then he sneaks away. Later, when the wheat plants grow and bear grain, weeds also grow among them.

The man's servants ask their master whether they should pluck out the weeds, but they are told to let them be "lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them." The servants are to let both kinds of plants continue to grow till harvest time. Then the master will order the reapers to gather, bundle and burn the weeds. The wheat will be safely stored in his barn.

This parable is, for one thing, an answer to the idea that God does not eradicate evil in the world because He is unable, or not powerful enough, to do so. Christ's words make it clear that God knows and recognizes the source of evil. When the servants ask why there are weeds, God answers, "An enemy has done this." God will deal with that enemy in His own time, identified in the parable as harvest time. At the end of human history, the Lord will act. Our job is to trust, and be ready. The parable gives us no timeline, but it tells us that God knows what He is doing, and that the enemy—the devil-- will without

doubt be vanquished.

Another reading for this day gives similar certainty. In I Corinthians 1: 7-8 Saint Paul urges patience and faith: "...so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ; who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The parable makes the point that the weeds are planted in the garden while people are asleep. This is a call to watchfulness and vigilance, a theme that already appears in the Old Testament. Proverbs 24: 33-34 cautions: "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come on you like a robber, and want like an armed man." Bad things may happen if we get complacent and "fold our hands" too much.

Saint Paul delivers a memorable call to watchfulness in Romans 13:11-12. He writes, "Besides this you know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand."

We have to be patient and let God's plan unfold. But the time of patience is also to be a time of getting ready, not sitting idly and waiting. God is working, we can be sure, and we need to be working too.