Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time: 7/23/23—9:30 and 11:30 AM

Over 30 years ago, my friend and classmate Fr. Gary Gebelein and I decided to rent bikes and ride the Katy Trail. It was a fantastic day, sunny and bright, perfect weather for a bike ride. There are two memories that stick with me from that day. One was seeing a large blacksnake crossing the trail ahead of us, and the other was coming across this large field of wheat blowing in the wind which made me think the “amber waves of grain” from the song “America the Beautiful.” Bordering that large field of wheat, though, were weeds that looked a lot like wheat, but they were just weeds. In fact, I stopped and plucked one stalk of wheat and one stalk of weeds and saved them for years—you can’t ever pass up a good homily prop—because they were almost identical and, unless you had a good eye, you could easily mistake the weeds for the wheat. One, the wheat, was nourishing, but the other, the weeds, was not. One, the wheat, was valuable, but the other, the weeds, was not. Yet they were almost identical, and again you could easily mistake the one for the other.

That trip on the Katy Trail 30 years ago always comes to my mind whenever I hear this parable from Jesus about the weeds and the wheat. Aren’t our values and the way we pursue them like the weeds and the wheat I saw those many years ago? We all seek joy. We all seek success. We all seek happiness. We all seek self-worth. However, don’t we often settle for weeds instead of wheat when we pursue those goals? Unfortunately too often as a world, as a country, as a society, as families, and as individuals, we seek that joy, that success, that happiness, and that self-worth from the weeds instead of from the wheat.

Earlier this week, as he reflected on one of the Gospels, Bishop Robert Barron showed us the path, the way, that can keep us from mistaking the weeds for the wheat when he wrote: ***Is Christ commanding your life in every detail? Is he the Lord of your family life? Of your recreational life? Of your professional life? Is he Lord of every room in your house, including the bedroom? Are you totally given over to him, under his lordship? I know that this may sound oppressive, but remember, "My yoke is easy, and my burden light." When we surrender to the path of love that he has laid out for us, our lives become infinitely lighter, easier, and more joyful, for we are moving with the divine purpose.***

If we find, in looking at our lives, that we have indeed been pursuing weeds and mistaking them for wheat, we don’t need to give up or give into despair or think that all is hopeless, because we believe in a God who has created everything out of nothing. We believe in a God who can turn water into wine. We believe in a God who can turn ordinary bread and wine into his very own Body and Blood. This means that this very same God can turn the weeds that we are into wheat. And what is required of us for this to happen? Simply put, what is asked of us is that we not get in God’s way.

But I think we need to always be asking ourselves the questions that Bishop Barron presented to us this past Thursday, ***Is Christ commanding your life in every detail? Is he the Lord of your family life? Of your recreational life? Of your professional life? Is he Lord of every room in your house, including the bedroom? Are you totally given over to him, under his lordship?*** Because otherwise we are getting in God’s way.