



Homily 16th Sunday in Ordinary time (A) - 2008

Most Rev. Jose H. Gomez

Archbishop of San Antonio

My dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

We gather this evening at the same time that the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI is celebrating Mass at the World Youth Day 2008. We are then, in unity of prayer and intentions with the Pope and the thousand of young people from all over the world and a good number of pilgrims from the Archdiocese of San Antonio with our Auxiliary Bishop, Bishop Oscar Cantu, celebrating our Catholic Faith.

As we know the theme of this year World Youth Day is “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses.” Let’s ask for the grace to open our hearts to the Holy Spirit, and through the grace of God, commit ourselves to share the gift of faith we have been given.

In his welcoming message to the pilgrims on Wednesday the Holy Father said: **“Our hearts and minds are (longing) yearning for a vision of life where love endures, where gifts are shared, where unity is built, where freedom finds meaning in truth, and where identity is found in respectful communion. This is the work of the Holy Spirit!** This is the hope held out by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is to bear witness to this reality that you were created anew at Baptism and strengthened through the gifts of the Spirit at Confirmation. Let this be the message that you bring from Sydney to the world!” (Pope Benedict XVI, 7/17/08).

This is also the message of today’s Gospel. It is an interesting passage of the Gospel because Jesus addresses the Apostles and the crowds with three parables. First he talks to them about the wheat and the weeds, then about the mustard seed and finally the yeast.

He goes from telling them that there is evil in the world to challenge them to change the world! “Whoever has ears ought to hear”

It is interesting to see in today’s gospel that the apostles were more interested in the parable of the wheat and the weeds than in the other two. “Then, dismissing the crowds, he went into the house. His disciples approached him and said, ‘Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field...’”

We will probably have the same reaction because it is so difficult to understand the presence of evil in the world. It is also difficult to accept that we have to let it be there as the parable says: ‘Let them grow together until harvest...’

In our days we can easily see that the world is full of good and evil, wheat and weeds. We hear and know about people who are troublemakers. We are constantly made aware of the tragedy of abortion, war, terrorism, violence, etc.

We also know that there are thousands and thousands of people in the world who are doing great things: people working with the poor, the disadvantaged, etc. There are people who work every day to preserve life and who try to make the world a better place.

Sometimes we think that if we could get rid of all that is evil and everyone that is evil, then the kingdom of heaven would be ours. We wouldn't have to worry anymore about bad people or bad things happening.

But as Jesus explains in his parable, if the farmer was to try and remove the weeds while the wheat was growing, he would damage the harvest. Likewise, if God removed all evil from the world his gift to us of **free will** would be meaningless. It is only because we can choose between good and evil that our choice is so important.

The good and the bad, when allowed to grow together until the harvest time, makes the harvest all the more glorious as the angels gather all of God's children and take them to heaven.

Then the challenge is "to overcome evil with good" as St. Paul says (Cf. Rom 12, 21). There is a serious obligation on our part to confront evil and do whatever we can to bring good out of a bad situation. Silence or indifference is not an option. We know that to keep silence in the face of an evil situation can be our way of giving approval to something that is wrong.

"Dear friends, the Holy Father said a couple of days ago, life is not governed by chance; it is not random. Your very existence has been willed by God, blessed and given a purpose (cf. Gen 1:28)! **Life is not just a succession of events or experiences, helpful though many of them are. It is a search for the true, the good and the beautiful. It is to this end that we make our choices; it is for this that we exercise our freedom; it is in this – in truth, in goodness, and in beauty – that we find happiness and joy.** Do not be fooled by those who see you as just another consumer in a market of undifferentiated possibilities, where choice itself becomes the good, novelty usurps beauty, and subjective experience displaces truth" (Pope Benedict XVI, 7/17/08).

Our time is not the time to be indifferent, "to fall asleep". It is time to come out with all the means at our disposal to help many people to know and love God (Cf. In Conversation with God, 4.28.3).

It is really up to us to 'overcome evil with good'. It is really up to us to be 'salt of the earth ... light of the world'.

Some time ago, I was reading a commentary on St. Mathew's gospel and it had the story of some missionaries talking about how to spread the Gospel all over the world. They talked about marketing strategies, literature, and all other ways to disseminate the gospel. Then a girl from Africa spoke to them. She said, 'when we want to take Christianity to one of our villages we don't send them books. We take a Christian family and send them to live in the village and they make the village Christian living there'.

To change the world, to bring Christ to the world we are the only and best 'marketing' we need to be a 'living Christ' to the people of our time. We are the people of God, the children of his grace and mercy. We are a people whose lives have been changed by his gospel. Nourished by his Word and sacraments, we are a people committed to bringing this good news of Jesus to everyone we meet, and to making disciples of all nations.

"In accepting the power of the Holy Spirit you too can transform your families, communities and nations. Set free the gifts! Let wisdom, courage, awe and reverence be the marks of greatness!" (Pope Benedict XVI, 7/19/08).

Keeping in mind that every kind word, every small act of generosity, every kind conversation or compassionate reaching out to another makes up our identity as followers of Jesus Christ.

To the point that other people will be able to say, in the words of a holy priest, "this person is a Christian, because he does not hate, because he is willing to understand, because he is not a fanatic, because he is willing to make sacrifices, because he shows that he is a man of peace, because he knows how to love" (Christ is passing by, 122).

Then, let us continue our journey of faith in this world of ours, where there are wheat and weeds, never forgetting that we are call to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world and as Jesus says in today's Gospel: "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father".

Let's also try to follow the advice of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI to the World Youth Day pilgrims: "Let your faith mature through your studies, work, sport, music and art. Let it be sustained by prayer and nurtured by the sacraments, and thus be a source of inspiration and help to those around you. In the end, life is not about accumulation. It is much more than success. To be truly alive is to be transformed from within, open to the energy of God's love". (Pope Benedict XVI, 7/19/08).

In this Year of St. Paul, my sisters and brothers, your generation must be a powerful witness to the love for God and one another, through a life of sharing generously the many gifts you have been given. My challenge to you, the young people of the Archdiocese of San Antonio is to be open to the will of God in your lives, and allow his

His Spirit to give you the power to, as St. Paul wrote, keep the faith, and let Grace, the very life of God inspire all that you do.

Let's ask the intercession of Mary, Spouse of the Holy Spirit, that each one of you, all of us, correspond to the power of the Holy Spirit to be witnesses, apostles of Jesus Christ in the 21st Century:

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses." Amen.