

“FIRST IMPRESSIONS” 16th SUNDAY -A-
Wisdom 12: 13, 16-19 Psalm 86 Rom 8: 26-27 Matthew 13: 24-30
By: Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

Sometimes even so-called experts and people who should know better can't predict how things are going to turn out. An expert evaluating a potential football coach said of him, "He possesses minimal football knowledge. Lacks motivation." He was talking about Vince Lombardi, who, though he "lacked motivation," was the successful football coach quoted for saying, "Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing." Eighteen publishers turned down a story about a seagull written by Richard Bach. "Jonathan Livingston Sea Gull" finally got published in 1970. In five years it sold more than 7 million copies in the U.S. alone. A music teacher told Enrico Caruso's parents that he had "no voice at all."

After Fred Astaire's screen test the evaluating director wrote, "Can't act, slightly bald, can dance a little." Astaire had the memo framed and put over his fire place. Even parents can't always judge their own children's abilities. Louisa May Alcott, known for the classic "Little Women," was encouraged by her parents to find work as a servant or seamstress. As they say, "Ya' just never know!"

A friend's father has a 1,200 acre farm. Reflecting on today's parable she said, "I left my family's farm when I went away to school. On a recent visit, early in the growing season, I looked at my father's just-sprouting wheat fields and I realized I couldn't tell the weeds from the wheat. When they are sprouting, they look identical to one another----until they ripen!" That's what the owner in the parable cautions, "Don't act too quickly. Don't jump to conclusions. Ya' just never know."

Summer is a great baseball time. We fans love to watch the game on tv or better, go to a ball park and shout support for the home team. If we are late arriving, the first thing we ask is, "Who's winning?" We don't ask, "Who's losing?" But as much as we love the game, if our team loses, we get over it, life moves on. But we tend to ask the same question about a more crucial issue. "Who's winning in the world, the good or the evil people?" We also want to know, in the long run, "Who's going to win?" These days things don't look like they are getting better for those on the side of good. The twentieth century was the most brutal in the history of the world. Remember the movie "Schindler's List?" It tells how Schindler

cleverly saved a few thousand Jews during World War II. The movie gave us something to cheer about. But six million Jews died, and countless others. And on and on. So, who's winning, good or evil? Are we on the losing side?

We are talking about weeds here---- the weeds the parable describes as sown among the good wheat by an enemy at night when everyone was asleep. And these weeds aren't just out there in the big wide world, they are much closer at hand, even within the church we love. Someone said to me recently, "I just can't stand one more headline about clergy misconduct or a bishop's cover-up!"

I think the early church saved this parable, and Matthew recorded it, because they also asked the same questions we and the servants in the parable ask, "Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where have the weeds come from?" And the question behind their question is ours as well, "Will evil or good have the last word? Who's going to win?" The parable doesn't give an easy answer, it doesn't explain it all to us... why evil exists... good things get corrupted... kids get messed up... suffering happens to good people, etc. But it does admit to the problem; good and evil coexist, up close to one another, up close to our lives ----and they are involved in a struggle for a final victory.

The weeds seem to get into everything, even the landscape of our own spiritual field. Now there are definitely times when we must make decisions about what is right and wrong. We do try to maintain standards, especially for our children. But this parable, addressed to our church and personal lives, where in our fervor we are quick to judge and act, pull up and cast aside, does suggest all the evidence isn't in yet. The parable also suggests that in some cases, even though we are pretty sure, we may not be in the position to cast a deciding judgment. The owner, after all, does introduce a note of caution and a plea for patience. In effect he is saying, "You do not really know enough. You do not have grounds to judge. All the evidence isn't in yet."

Jesus, the teller of the parable, knew from his own experience. He chose servants to do God's work who, if you looked at the early signs, didn't turn out as expected. Judas, who was the keeper of the purse, a mover and shaker, showed early signs of promise. What about the Peter's failures, Thomas the doubter and the other men and women who kept coming up with the wrong answers to Jesus' questions? These latter ones showed little initial promise, yet Jesus gave them a chance to grow and yield a rich harvest. "Ya' just never know."

Today's parable is an encouraging one for each of us. It is a story of grace, patience and hope. Aren't we, who frequently look back on mistakes we have made, glad we had time to change and make amends? Aren't we grateful for the chance and help God gave us to work things out? What used to be a weed, we were sure, turned out to be wheat. Suppose we had been judged on the spot back then? Today, as we look at our present situation, we can still detect weeds in ourselves and others---- we are sure. Rather than being overcome by discouragement, the parable proposes a note of hope. After all, good seed has been planted in us and is growing. The burden of the struggle isn't ours alone. We trust the owner, who knows what is happening, to help us sort things out. All this is summarized in a familiar, but often under-appreciated word----Grace.

Even as we feel dismayed at how much there is still left to do and how many questions we have ("Who's winning?"), the parable gives us confidence. God is in charge. God is not indifferent to our struggle. God is not unaware of what still needs doing. God is guiding us in our struggle to bring about good. So, we will play the parable back in our imaginations, especially when things around us dismay and discourage us. We will look out at the field and think we know what needs doing. But we will hear this parable, and the voice that says, "Not so fast. Ya' just never know."

ONE GOOD BOOK FOR THE PREACHER

(New Spanish-language Bible for youths introduced)

Leaders and supporters of Instituto Fe y Vida celebrated the publication of a Spanish-language Bible for youths in the Americas June 17. At a breakfast held in conjunction with the U.S. bishops' mid-June meeting in Chicago, they spoke about the recent launch of La Biblia Catolica Para Jovenes (The Catholic Bible for Youth) and honored some of the U.S. bishops and other leaders who helped make it possible. Before La Biblia was first introduced at a Los Angeles archdiocesan religious education congress this February, there was no version of the Bible in Spanish aimed specifically at adolescents and young adults, said the Instituto Fe y Vida (Institute for Faith and Life). Fe y Vida, based in Stockton, Calif., coordinated the project and pulled together the funding for it, including a major grant from the Knights of Columbus.

----from the Catholic News Service

submitted by: Rev. Angel Manuel Del-Rio-Rubio, O.P.

Director of Formation Programs, Instituto FE y VIDA, 2502 Comburg Castle

Way,
Austin, TX 78748

QUOTABLE

I bow to the sacred in all creation.

May my spirit fill the world with beauty and wonder.

May my mind seek truth with humility and openness.

May my heart forgive without limit.

May my love for friend, enemy, and outcast be without measure.

May my needs be few and my living simple.

May my actions bear witness to the suffering of others.

May my hands never harm a living being.

May my steps stay on the journey of justice.

May my tongue speak for those who are poor without fear of the powerful.

May my prayers rise with patient discontent until no child is hungry.

May my life's work be a passion for peace and nonviolence.

May my soul rejoice in the present moment.

May my imagination overcome death and despair with new possibility.

And may I risk reputation, comfort, and security to bring this hope to the children.

Mary Lou Kownacki, OSB

----from the Social Justice Office of the diocese of Oakland

JUSTICE NOTES

For deacons: The deacon should be the one who brings to the pastoral staff an awareness of the needs of the people, not only in the parish, but also in the broader community. The deacon should be the one prepared to address social justice issues in the larger community, and in the workplace—bringing back an awareness and a raising of consciousness to the faith community which he also serves. This is the unique contribution which the deacon can make both to the parochial staff and community—Cardinal Joseph Bernadin, “The Call to Service: Pastoral Statement on the Diaconate,” Quoted in PREACH, September/October, page 12

POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

“Can you imagine what it’s like to have your boy on death row? Can you imagine

what it's like to visit him there every Saturday and tell him, 'I love you. I'll see you next week,' when you never know if they're going to call and say, 'He's up next—it's time for his execution.'”

----Jeanetter Johnson, Mother of Alan Gell, who was retried and found innocent because prosecutors withheld evidence that might have cleared him of first-degree murder.

[The News and Observer, February 15, 2004, Raleigh, NC]

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I am posting in this space several inmates' names and locations. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know that: we have not forgotten them; are praying for them and their families; or, whatever personal encouragement you might like to give them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, "People of Faith Against the Death Penalty."

Thanks, Jude Siciliano, OP

Please write to:.....

Edward E. Davis #0100579 (On death row since 3/12/92)

Kenneth B. Rouse #0353186 (3/25/92)

Michael M. Reeves #0339314 (5/14/92)

-----Central Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, NC 27606

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

1. CD Available: **“FIRST IMPRESSIONS: PREACHING REFLECTIONS ON LITURGICAL YEAR A.”** The CD contains two reflections for almost all the Sundays and major feasts of the year. In addition, there are helpful essays for preaching during the liturgical seasons (Advent, Lent, the Triduum, etc.), ten book reviews and essays on various aspects of preaching. The files are in three formats (Microsoft Word, WordPerfect and Adobe Acrobat Reader) so you should have no trouble opening them on your computer. To purchase go to:

<http://www.preacherexchange.com> click on the “Year A–CD” button on the right and follow the instructions.

2. I get notes from people responding to these reflections. Sometimes they tell how they use “First Impressions” in their ministry and for personal use. Others respond to the reflections, make suggestions and additions. I think our readers would benefit from these additional thoughts. If you drop me a BRIEF note, I will be happy to add your thoughts and reflections to my own. (Judeop@Juno.com)

3. Our webpages: <http://www.preacherexchange.com> and <http://www.opsouth.org/> (Where you will find “Preachers’ Exchange,” which includes “First Impressions” and “Homilias Dominicales,” as well as

articles, book reviews and quotes pertinent to preaching.)

4. "Homilias Dominicales"-- these Spanish reflections are written by three friars of the Southern Dominican Province, Jose David Padilla, OP, Wilmo Candanedo, OP and two Dominican sisters, Regina Mc Carthy, OP and Doris Regan, OP.

Like "First Impressions", "Homilias Dominicales" are a preacher's early reflections on the upcoming Sunday readings and liturgy. So, if you or a friend would like to receive "Homilias Dominicales" drop a note to John Boll, O.P. at: Jboll@opsouth.org or jboll@preacherexchange.org

5. "First Impressions" is a service to preachers and those wishing to prepare for Sunday worship. It is sponsored by the Southern Dominican Province, U.S.A. If you would like "First Impressions" sent weekly to a friend, send a note to John Boll at the above Email address.

DONATIONS

If you would like to support this ministry, please send tax deductible contributions to Jude Siciliano, O.P., whose address is listed below. Make checks to:

Dominican Friars of Raleigh. Or, go to our webpage to make an online donation:

<http://www.preacherexchange.com>

Thank you.

Blessings on your preaching,

Jude Siciliano, O.P., Promoter of Preaching, Southern Dominican Province, USA

P.O. Box 12927, Raleigh, N.C. 27605, (919) 833-1893, Email: judeop@juno.com