

16th Sunday of Ordinary Time A “Ants, Grasshoppers and Starfish”

Fr. Frank Schuster

My friends, this weekend’s Gospel made think about ants, grasshoppers, and starfish! I promise I will explain. This weekend just like last weekend, Jesus likens the heavenly Father to an eccentric gardener. This time our eccentric gardener allows the weeds and the wheat to grow together until the harvest. This parable reminds me of a famous fable written in the 6th century BC by Aesop. I think you will remember it.

It begins...In a field one summer’s day a Grasshopper was hopping about, chirping and singing to its heart’s content. An Ant passed by, bearing along with great toil an ear of corn he was taking to the nest. “Why not come and chat with me,” said the Grasshopper, “instead of toiling and moiling in that way?” “I am helping to lay up food for the winter,” said the Ant, “and recommend you to do the same.” “Why bother about winter?” said the Grasshopper, “we have got plenty of food at present.” But the Ant went on its way and continued its toil. When the winter came the Grasshopper had no food, and found itself dying of hunger, while it saw the ants distributing every day corn and grain from the stores they had collected in the summer. Then the Grasshopper knew: “It is best to prepare for the days of necessity!”

This is a good fable to remember, especially during the summer. When it comes to the parable of the weeds and the wheat, Jesus is trying to explain to us a couple important life lessons. First, he is explaining to us that although good and evil coexist in the world, only the good will make it to heaven. Second, he is asking us to therefore consider the areas in our lives that are like the weeds and the areas in our lives that are like the wheat. Are we like the ant in Aesop’s fable who does the hard work today to prepare for tomorrow or are we like the grasshopper, putting off to tomorrow what we should be doing today?

Of course, there is a problem with Aesop’s fable that is worth mentioning. It boils down to charity. Once the grasshopper learned his lesson, do you think the ant could have given him something to eat out of charity? I think the problem is remedied by another fable written by Loren Eiseley in the 70’s. I think you will remember this one as well.

Once upon a time, there was a wise man who used to go to the ocean to do his writing. He had a habit of walking on the beach before he began his work. One day, as he was walking along the shore, he looked down the beach and saw a human figure moving like a dancer. He smiled to himself at the thought of someone who would dance to the day, and so, he walked faster to catch up. As he got closer, he noticed that the figure was that of a young man, and that what he was doing was not dancing at all. The young man was reaching down to the shore, picking up small objects, and throwing them into the ocean. He came closer still

and called out "Good morning! May I ask what it is that you are doing?" The young man paused, looked up, and replied "Throwing starfish into the ocean." "I must ask, then, why are you throwing starfish into the ocean?" asked the somewhat startled wise man. To this, the young man replied, "The sun is up and the tide is going out. If I don't throw them in, they'll die." Upon hearing this, the wise man commented, "But, young man, do you not realize that there are miles and miles of beach and there are starfish all along every mile? You can't possibly make a difference!" At this, the young man bent down, picked up yet another starfish, and threw it into the ocean. As it met the water, he said, "I made a difference to that one!"

Why does this fable of the starfish help Aesop's fable of the ant and the grasshopper? It is what Jesus was getting at I think with the parable of the mustard seed that he also shares with us this Sunday. The mustard seed is one of the smallest seeds you can find, but when properly planted and cultivated, it can grow into a very large plant. So in contrast to the parable of the weeds and the wheat, we are also called to be mustard seeds by doing little things with great love, becoming leaven for the world.

There are many spiritual gems to consider from the Gospel this weekend. First, we should be good stewards of our time, talent and treasure, not putting off to tomorrow what we should be doing today. We can also ask ourselves, what are the areas in our relationship with God that are like the weeds? What are the areas in our relationship with God that are like the wheat? What are the little mustard seeds we can plant today that will provide us shade tomorrow? The Lord invites us this Sunday to make a plan before it's too late. This is how our Gospel reading ends, with a reminder that there will be a day of reckoning someday. This is why in my humble opinion during the summer it is helpful to remember ants, grasshoppers and starfish.