

- In December 1577 St. John of the Cross was arrested and imprisoned in Toledo, Spain, under the harshest of circumstances. Ironically, he was arrested and imprisoned by his fellow Carmelites who were resisting the very necessary reforms St. John wanted to bring to them.
- John was put into a 6' x 10' windowless cell, whose only light came through a 2" opening high up on the wall separating the cell from the hallway.
- The walls and floors were of stone; his bed was a few boards and scant blankets on the floor that afforded little protection from cold and chill. His bathroom was a bucket in the corner of his cell, which was located by the monastery bathrooms, forcing him to endure the bad odors.
- The friars imprisoning John hoped to break him down physically, mentally, and spiritually, and to further their aim they brought him to the refectory once a week, stripped him to his waist, and then publicly flogged him. All 80 of them!
- The worst part of all was that St. John was not allowed to offer Mass during his imprisonment, and he struggled to pray his breviary because of the lack of light in his cell.
- After 9 grueling months of this torture, he managed to escape his captors and find freedom, and the reforms St. John so ardently desired were accepted, which led to the creation of a new branch of Carmelites that was more faithful to the original practices of the order.
- What's striking about St. John's story is how evil and good were allowed to exist side-by-side even within one of the greatest, saint-producing religious orders of the Church!
- Yet as our Gospel makes clear today, this is not something novel or new, for good and evil – weeds and wheat – often grow together in our world.
- Let us not forget that even in our Lord's own day, amongst His 12 specially chosen followers, there was one who was a thief and a traitor: Judas. Even amidst the wheat of the apostles was the weed that betrayed our Lord and ushered in His terrible passion.
- It's a bit shocking to consider that our Lord allows good and evil to co-exist as they do, but He does. Rather than using His omnipotence to rid the world of evil and prevent the suffering that evil causes, God allows the weeds and the wheat to grow together.
- So many times when something bad happens and we're forced to endure some type of evil or suffering, we wonder why God didn't stop it. If God is truly all-powerful, why doesn't He use His power to protect us from evil? Why does He allow evil to exist in the world?
- This is a complicated question, of course, and not one that can be answered in the short span of a homily, but we are given an interesting explanation from our Lord in the Gospel when He says, "if you pull up the weeds you might uproot the wheat along with them."
- St. Augustine's understanding of this passage is that because we are weak, we need to be mixed up with evil in order that we might be tested by trials and thereby grow in strength.
- St. Augustine also opines that our Lord refused to destroy the weeds of this world, lest they be denied the opportunity to convert and become wheat.
- We can certainly see this in the life of St. John of the Cross. Severely tested as he was during his imprisonment in Toledo, St. John grew to the very heights of holiness through what he suffered, and his suffering gave birth to his greatest and most beautiful writings.
- Moreover, St. John's silence and patience in the face of his suffering brought about conversion in some of his brother Carmelites who beforehand had opposed him.
- Our Lord loves to bring good out of evil, but to do so we have to be willing to endure the evils of this life with faith, hope, and charity: steadfast faith that God is ultimately in control

of all that happens, confident hope that our sufferings will make us holier and more pleasing to God, and a burning charity that loves even those who bring evil into our lives.

- When we can face the evils in our life in this way, we are proved as gold is proven in fire, and the evils that we endure become a crucible that help to burn away the weeds in our souls, so that we can become good and strong wheat for the Kingdom.
- The marvelous thing about becoming wheat, of being *good*, is that good is diffusive of itself. It is the nature of goodness to share itself, to pour itself out, to spread itself to others.
- And this is how we understand the second parable in the Gospel today, that the “kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that . . . when full-grown it . . . becomes a large bush, and the ‘birds of the sky come and dwell in its branches.’”
- As we become *good*, we want others to experience *goodness* too. Virtue is never something that we keep to ourselves. As we grow in virtue and holiness, others are necessarily positively affected by our goodness – hopefully inducing conversion within them.
- Our goodness, our virtue, has a leavening effect on others. As Christians we are called to be the good yeast in this world so that others might come to love God and neighbor too!
- Of course, today’s Gospel makes another important point: viz., that there will be a reckoning some day for all of us. The weeds and the wheat will be harvested, with the wheat being gathered into our Lord’s barn. But the weeds shall be tied into bundles and burned.
- And so we must choose whether we are going to be weeds or wheat, whether we are going to be the children of God or the children of the evil one.
- Hopefully we will trust in our Lord’s promises of mercy and become His children. For as our first reading points out, even though our Lord is all-powerful, his “mastery over all things makes [Him] lenient to all.” Our Lord desires our repentance; He is good and forgiving.
- Isn’t it interesting that instead of using His omnipotence to destroy all evil in this world, our Lord’s omnipotence is a means of mercy?
- Normally when we think of God’s power, we think of all the reasons we should fear Him and be in awe of Him. But our first reading speaks differently in that it shows us that God’s omnipotence should cause us to trust in His mercy.
- In His omnipotence God is meek and gentle. He exercises His omnipotence not merely for Himself and His own glory, but because good is diffusive of itself, God exercises His omnipotence for us – so that we might be saved!
- In His omnipotence He’s willing to forgive and forget. He’s willing to do whatever He must in order for us to be saved. What’s important is that we make the conscious choice to be wheat in this world rather than weed, to seek goodness and to spread goodness.
- And in moments when we encounter evil, we must see in it a chance to grow in holiness, an opportunity to grow closer to our Lord, a means of bringing others to Christ.
- In 1616, during the beatification process of St. John of the Cross, his jailer during the 2nd half of his imprisonment, Fr. John of St. Mary, had this to say of St. John of the Cross:

“He was a man of great virtue and sanctity. In his most difficult situation he showed great humility, great fortitude and magnanimity. Nothing that happened caused him to be upset, pained or afflicted. On the contrary, he showed a wonderful capacity to suffer. He showed a marvelous love for the Lord, and hope in His Majesty. And he was very grateful for any little favor done to him.”

- In our moments of sufferings, may we be the same and thus become good wheat for the Kingdom. St. John of the Cross, pray for us!