

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR A

Second Reading Romans 8: 26–27

Over the centuries, the Letter to the Romans has been regarded as one of the most influential pieces of Scripture. Up to 28 extracts from it are read over the three years of the Sunday Catholic Lectionary.

This letter was addressed to the Church in Rome, which included both Jews and Gentiles. It was probably written 57–58 AD in Corinth, when Paul was nearing the end of his third missionary journey around the Eastern Mediterranean. It pre-dates all of the Gospels.

It is unusual for being written to a church that Paul had yet to visit. Rome, of course, was the most important town of the Roman Empire, and the Christians in Rome had contacts with many of the outlying districts of the empire.

The most-read chapter is Chapter 8, and today's excerpt comes from the end of a section where Paul discusses the Christian's spiritual life.

These verses are among the most familiar and comforting. Even though Paul writes about 'us' (meaning himself and other fellow Christians in Rome), we, as modern Christians, can also feel included.

The Holy Spirit is there to help us transcend our weakness, and makes us able to express what we find difficult or don't even realise we need to formulate. It is part of God's loving plan for us that the Holy Spirit should play that helping role.



The Spirit comes to help us in our weakness



Gospel Matthew 13: 24–30

This week's Parable of the Darnel (or 'the wheat and the tares') is unique to Matthew, following last week's Parable of the Sower. Here, too, the setting is agricultural: farming was the principal occupation of those in Palestine at the time. Just as last week, today's parable attempts to answer the underlying question of the previous chapter: why is Jesus failing to win over the people of Israel?

The kingdom of heaven may be compared to ...

This is another kingdom parable, dealing with God's judgement at the end of time.

A man sowed good seed in his field

The attention of the listeners is caught straight away. It would be unusual for a landowner, who we learn has slaves, to have done the sowing himself.

While everybody was asleep

This rich owner, able to grow wheat rather than the more ordinary barley, was very lax. It would have been expected that he would have protected his land.

Some enemy has done this

Another unusual element to keep the audience alert. The owner knows that the weeds have not occurred naturally, but have been put in by an enemy.

When the new wheat sprouted and ripened, the darnel appeared as well

The darnel is a bad weed with poisonous seeds, but looks remarkably like wheat as it grows. Only at maturity does the difference between the two become apparent. The ear of the wheat droops, heavy with grain, whereas the ear of the darnel, with its very light seeds, remains upright. Darnel grows freely in Israel and was the bane of a farmer's life at a time when there were no weed killers.



Wheat [L]; Darnel [R]

When you weed out the darnel, you might pull up the wheat with it

Sowing was done by hand and not in neat rows, so the roots would have been entangled; pulling out one would disturb the other. As the Book of Leviticus decrees, 'you are not to sow two kinds of grain in your field' (19: 19): the field itself would then become impure, and simply removing the weeds would not be enough to satisfy the Law.

At harvest time

The good and the bad will be separated at the Final Judgement. The darnel will be burnt. Fire is often used as a purifier in the Old Testament (see Malachi 3: 3).