God the Farmer

Why does God let evil continue and evil people get away with it?

These are questions that often undermine a person’s faith. When we are in the midst of suffering, explanations of why it is happening are not much help. All we want is for it to stop.

If we love our neighbour we have a duty to come to the help of those in need. It is the calling of every human being, whether they have faith or none, to do all that they can to alleviate suffering.

But still there is the question about God. If he won’t help then he must be a cruel God, or if he can’t then he’s not much of a God. And this leads many to say that he does not exist.

The parable that Jesus told in this Sunday’s Gospel provides food for thought on this whole business. He speaks of a farmer sowing good seed in the ground but then,

*While everybody was asleep his enemy came, sowed darnel all among the wheat, and made off.*

The darnel weeds sown in the field with the good crop stands for evil in the world. Jesus describes the servants asking if they should go into the field to root out the darnel so that the good seed might flourish and grow unhindered.

But the farmer knew that any attempt to do this would be likely to damage the healthy plants. Uprooting the weeds would tear at the roots of the wheat.

So we are being told that God allows evil in the world because rooting it out would damage us.

Our response might be that God should have the power to remove the evil in a better way. After all, with our more sophisticated technical knowhow could we not find ways to eradicate the darnel? There was a time, not long ago, when we would have probably pointed out the various weed-killers that we have developed which keep our crops free from such problems.

In some ways we have learnt that it is not as simple as that. The chemicals and agents that we use in farming are now seen to have side effects. Will there come a day when we have a product that does exactly and only what it says on the tin – get rid of the weeds?

We don’t know.

Does this mean that God will do nothing about evil?

God’s response to evil is Jesus Christ.

In the meantime we recognise that what seems to be an easy answer is not so straightforward. Jesus tells us in the parable that it is not that he wants evil to flourish; he is determined to get rid of it eventually.
The farmer has to be patient, just as God is patient. The trouble is that for us it can’t happen soon enough – stop the sorrow and pain!

When we think of both the darnel and good seed being present in each of us it becomes even more complicated. I would like the evil in me to disappear and the wrong desires and intentions that I have to fade away.

But, if I am honest, I recognise that they are part of who I am; the other side of much that is good in me. My anger can be used for good purposes as well as ill; my scheming can build others up as well as tear them down.

Jesus invites us to be part of his kingdom and to work for good. We are to be his instruments bringing comfort and help to those in need. He does not flatten us when we refuse or fail him. Even the badness of our lives can provide moments for grace and growth.

We have to accept that there are weeds and pests in our lives. Some of these are within us and some in those around us. We are asked to be patient and tolerant. Each of us has been planted with love and care. God will harvest the good of our hearts in his own time.