

OT: Wisdom of Solomon 12:13, 16-19

NT: Romans 8:12-25

Gp: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Today a young child becomes a Christian, and this beautiful occasion, taken together with today's readings, prompts a brief reflection on how God works in our lives to guide us to glory.

Firstly, to say that God is at work in the lives of everyone, and everyone experiences the grace of God. The whole of creation experiences the grace of God. But baptism is a sign of being saved, and of living in the hope God has given us in Jesus Christ. In our baptism we are doused in good hope, we are immersed in the saving power of Jesus Christ, which is offered to everyone, but not forced on anyone. So, in baptism a foundation of hope is laid for the rest of our lives, which makes a real difference to who we become, knowing that whatever happens, we have been claimed and adopted by God as his children.

Secondly, to say that the parable of the wheat and the weeds that we just heard might sound like it describes a hands off God, who leaves us to fend for ourselves, and lets the enemy ruin things. But that's to mishear the story. God gives us freedom, to choose good, or to choose evil, and we have to live with the consequences of our own choices, and other people's too. But the soil remains good, the sun and the rain remain good, and in the life of the Christian, our adoption means that within us there is an invincible power at work, even when we feel our weakness and limitations, and mistakes, most acutely.

And that brings me to my third and final point – St Paul writing to the first Christians in Rome, describes how the Spirit of God is at work in our lives, urging and enabling us to call God 'Abba! Father!'. Abba is often translated as Daddy, or Dad – a term of profound intimacy in contrast to the exalted lordly language used so often in Scripture to describe God. Paul would end his days, a prisoner, in Rome, awaiting execution before a mocking crowd. His baptism and faith did not deliver him from the weeds and the empty hatred of the enemy, that destroys, but cannot create, but it set him free from living in fear. His faith gave him hope, and the assurance that whatever highs and lows came his way, he was not alone. God is with us, praying within us. And by the grace of God we are set free each day from the burden of our sins, by receiving salvation, again and again, daily course corrections, when we turn again to Christ and ask for his mercy and new beginnings.

We are gathered for a baptism, but also as a community around the altar, and here, week by week, we recall and are transported, to the fellowship of the Last Supper, the intimacy of Christ's love for his friends; to the foot of the cross at Calvary; and always, to the empty tomb. Baptism is a triumph of hope over fear, of grace over pride, of love over hatred, of life over death. Here, in this mortal life, we receive food for the journey, and hope that beyond this life, and this world, with all its glory and grime, there is more, much more, everlastingly more. 'For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.'

Fr Philip Anderson