



THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER  
**EPIPHANY**  
Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

by: Rev. Gerhard Grabenhofer

**Collect of the Day:**

O Lord, keep Your family the Church continually in the true faith, that, relying on the hope of Your heavenly grace, we may ever be defended by Your mighty power; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

**Introit:**

Psalm 37:1-2, 9, 39 (antiphon: Psalm 37:6, 18)  
– *The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD*

**Psalm:**

80:1-7 (antiphon: v.7) – *Restore us, O God of hosts*

**Old Testament Reading:**

Genesis 18:20-33 – *Abraham intercedes for the sinful city of Sodom*

**Gradual:**

Psalm 102:15-16 – *The Gentiles, too, will fear the Lord and be brought into His Church*

**Epistle:**

Colossians 3:12-17 – *In baptism God gives us the virtues of Christ, and in the Divine Service He continues to give us grace to strengthen faith that we may live our lives to His glory*

**Verse:**

Psalm 97:7 – *Alleluia. The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad! Alleluia.*

**Matthew 13:24-30** ESV

**Author and Date:**

The Holy Spirit caused St. Matthew Levi the Apostle and Evangelist to write this gospel around AD 50. Our verses come in the midst of a series of parables about the kingdom of heaven that Jesus is telling the people.

<sup>24</sup> [Jesus] put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field,

- Jesus in this parable describes the visible Church, as it appears in the world. C.F.W. Walther notes: “As long as God’s Church is on earth, there are people who will look more closely at its life than at its doctrine. Some have always asserted that if a church really wants to be the Church of God, it must be completely pure. Sin and godlessness, they say, should not be found in the true Church. All of its members must be believers, born again, and pious, and the most blessed peace must prevail among them. Many people remain in heterodox fellowships because they find many sins in the orthodox Church. Even some of those within the Church itself are vexed for the same reason, and they may separate from it and join a sect that has a holy appearance. It is for such people as these that Jesus related the parable in our text about weeds among the wheat. It should serve to publicly shame those who are offended at the evil in the Church. Christ’s Church on earth cannot be purified from all evil.” (*God Grant It*, 178)
- Jesus is the sower and the field is the world. The fruit of the word—wheat—that grows in the field are the Christians (Matthew 13:38; James 1:18, 1 Peter 1:24). Through the Word Christ fills the world with Christians and builds His Church.

<sup>25</sup> but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away.

- This is the work of the devil and his evil angels in trying to destroy true doctrine and right use of the sacraments. The evil angels are behind everything that harms the Church.
- “The condition of the kingdom of heaven—or the Church—is such that wherever the Word of God is proclaimed, there the devil, too, sows his heresies, as the saying goes: ‘Where God builds a church, the devil also wants to have a chapel or a tavern.’” (*Luther’s Works*, 67:195)
- “...It is impossible to take precautions against heretics. Indeed, while the apostles are confidently and joyfully teaching the Word in the hope that everything will remain pure and secure, behold, suddenly there arise against them false apostles and false brethren, as if they were sleeping and fearing nothing of the kind.” (*Luther’s Works*, 67:197)

<sup>26</sup> So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also.

- The kingdom of heaven—the Church—in its visible form in the world is like a field of wheat in which there is both wheat—true Christians—and weeds—hypocrites and sham Christians. One who rejects the Gospel cannot be a member of the Christian Church—the true, invisible Church—although they may outwardly have a connection with and belong to the outward, visible Church
- The damage of false doctrine is discovered too late.
- “Thus so long as the heretics hide under the appearance of being with us, they are most beautiful, but when they start to teach and act in opposition to us, soon the Spirit of truth discerns them.” (*Luther’s Works*, 67:199)

<sup>27</sup> And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?’

- The Christians are described in the parable as both the wheat—the fruit of the seed of the Word –and the servants who spread the seed of the word.

<sup>28</sup> He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ So the servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’

- “It is the highest wisdom not to be scandalized if evil men and heretics are in the Church and come from the Church, for here He says that it is ‘an enemy’ who sows them. And it is the greatest comfort to know that they will not harm us in any way; rather we are obliged to endure the tares that are intermingled.” (*Luther’s Works*, 67:200)

<sup>29</sup> But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them.’

- “...If we do not want to endure any tares, there will not be any Church either. For since the Church cannot exist without tares, uprooting the tares would be the same as uprooting the Church.” (*Luther’s Works*, 67:200)

<sup>30</sup> Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.”

- Only at the end of the world will the faithful be separated from the godless—and this by the angels on the Last Day (Matthew 13:41). The holy angels will attend Jesus at His return (Matthew 24:31, 25:31), gather people from all over the world, separate believers from non-believers, and drive the condemned to hell
- “Endure them and be long-suffering. Do not wish that you were without evil men and heretics; you will be unable to change this, It belongs to Me to pass judgment on this in the judgment that is to come, when I shall free you from this suffering, etc.’.... But when [false teachers] take no interest in the reproof, let them be; have patience; and do not despair for the Church on that account.... We should not give anyone license to sin nor consent to it. But if they persist in sinning after they have despised our admonitions, then we let them go their own way.” (*Luther’s Works*, 67:201-202)
- [Jesus suffered, died, rose and ascended into heaven] “so that the devil and all his powers must be subject to Him and lie at His feet until, finally, at the Last Day, He will completely divide and separate us from the wicked world, the devil, death, sin and such.” (*Large Catechism*, II:31)

