Being less than perfect is perfectly acceptable

We're all seasick, plus what to do with the weeds: A reflection on the Gospel for the 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time.

It's an unreasonable expectation, but it's there: We are to be perfect at what we do. Anything less risks being labelled a failure. Unfortunately, we too easily bring that attitude to religion, as if being Catholic comes with the assumption that we must be perfect, that is, we must be *sinless*. This Sunday's Gospel proclamation (Matthew 13:24-43) reminds us that being less than perfect is perfectly acceptable.

Perhaps I was a teenager or young adult when I heard that the correct reply to that false assumption is that that's exactly what we say about ourselves, too. Just because we go to church doesn't mean we always behave like angels. In the spirit of the famous Catholic author, G.K. Chesterton: "We're all in the same boat, and we're all seasick."

This Sunday's proclamation of the Gospel offers us three parables to help us with this acceptance of imperfection. In quiet moments, we might look at ourselves in the mirror and see some attitudes, patterns, and choices that conflict with our convictions. We might rightly regret what we see and feel regret in knowing there's no undo or delete button we can hit to rid ourselves of them.

The first parable acknowledges the difficulty in pulling out some of the weeds in our lives without causing great harm. That's not to say the Lord permits anything as being okay. However, the parable can remind you to focus more on where God's grace is more clearly present, or rather, to focus on nurturing what is good in your life.

For example, a homeowner is said to have had a horribly weedy lawn. Try as he might, he couldn't get rid of the weeds. He contacted a lawn care company to evaluate the problem. Their diagnosis was so severe that the company refused to try to remedy the problem. A neighbour offered to remove the lawn and lay down new sod. The homeowner then talked with his nephew who had a farm.

His farmer-nephew advised him not to worry about the weeds and not to try to get rid of them. Instead, he advised his uncle simply to focus on growing the grass, saying that the grass would then take care of the

weeds. The homeowner did just that: he did all he could to grow what he really wanted — green grass. Sure enough, with time, the weeds pretty well disappeared, and the lawn was as lush as any in the neighbourhood.

In other words, nurturing what is good often crowds out the weeds to where they're no longer there. Nobody needs to tell you and me about our *sins*. The parables suggest that sometimes God doesn't want us to do anything severe to get rid of the weeds in our lives, that God can handle them just fine. The better wisdom might be to remain open to God's grace that grows the wheat of a deeper relationship with God.

The Good News we proclaim when we gather on Sundays has nothing to do with any sense of our own perfection. Instead, we gather because we lack perfection. With the Sacrament at the altar, Jesus brings us to his perfect eternal sacrifice on the Cross. We then open ourselves to the gift of Communion, not as a reward for being perfect, but because we need God's help — we need God's grace — to be a people focused on the words of Jesus: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done."

"We're all in the same boat, and we're all seasick."

And the day we are found perfect is the day we no longer need to be there.