“Be strong, be just, and be lenient.” These are not mutually exclusive ideals; they are in fact all necessarily required in order to receive the fulfillment of the prayer we heard this morning from the Book of Wisdom. Namely, we have a God who is strong, just, and lenient; and by God’s grace, we are all called to temper our affairs with strength, justice, and clemency. But how can we be strong when we have fallen?

St. Paul testifies to God’s grace when he declares, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9b) And how are we to exercise justice when only God is the judge? True we are not to judge, but we are called to work for justice, not man’s justice, but God’s justice, which restores and redeems through forgiveness. And how are we to exercise this forgiveness, this clemency? Simply said we are to forgive as we are forgiven. (Matthew 6:9-13)
So in a messy world where there is much weakness, injustice, and retribution, what are we to do? Are we called to go on a crusade to eradicate sinners or create sanctuaries for the holy ones? Wouldn't it be great to work to make our Church pure? Aren't we called to make our communities safe, even if it means expelling the sinners, and the children of Satan? Don't feel alone when you want to resort to these most draconian approaches to deal with evil and evildoers. The answers to these nagging questions of sin and evil in the world can be found in today's Gospel.

In the parable of the weeds and the wheat, the well-meaning workers ask the master if he wants them to uproot the weeds that have been sown into the field. It sounds like a good idea. If one removes the weeds it will free the wheat to grow more freely without competition from the weeds. The problem is that in pulling the weeds one may also uproot the wheat. The problem with this approach is obvious for the care of the crop. It is not as obvious when it comes to our personal journey or the spiritual life of the community. We have all strayed from time to time and so it is good that God is patient with us, allows us to see the error of our ways, and allows us the time to come to our senses and return to Him. Are we ready to allow others this time, to reform before expelling them from the community?

Deeper still is the meaning of psychological wholeness and spiritual holiness that never excludes the problem from the solution. If it is wholeness that we seek then it must hold both the dark and the light side of things. Our sins always have something to teach us, so let us not forget them until they have had a chance to teach us what only they can teach. Primarily our sins can teach us how much we need God. The pain of sin can purify us, help us know ourselves, and to ask for mercy. At the point we admit our powerlessness and throw ourselves on the mercy of God – it is then that God can transform us. This is a lifetime of spiritual work. Are we patient with ourselves and trust that God will deal with us patiently and lovingly? A mystic, Julian of Norwich, wrote, “All will be well, all will be well, and all matter of things will be well.” Like the dough in the Gospel parable, the whole batch will be leveled.