

16<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, 19 July 2020

Scriptures: Wisdom 12:13,16-19; Romans 8:26-27; Matt.13:24-43

Homily: Fr. Ken

Today's scripture readings give us pause for critical reflection. Why critical reflection?

Here is one example. This past Tuesday, people celebrated Bastille Day. One well-known U.S. politician made the off-handed sarcastic remark: "What have the French ever done for us?" Another one responded: "Well, remember what Sir Winston Churchill said in World War II: 'It's not just France we are fighting for, it's Champagne!'

What was missing was critical reflection on the reality of history. A few weeks back we celebrated July 4<sup>th</sup>, our American Independence Day. Consider for a moment that the very war that gave birth to our nation, our war of independence, would almost certainly have failed had it not been for heavy French financial backing and military support, both on land and sea. At the crucial surrender of the British at Yorktown, the French army under Rochambeau was larger than our own army commanded by Washington. The British commander, Cornwallis, had no choice but to surrender because a French naval fleet had just sailed into Chesapeake Bay. The all-important treaty ending the Revolutionary War wherein King George III recognized the United States to be "free, sovereign, and independent" was actually signed in Paris. The plan for the new capital city on the Potomac was designed by a French engineer, Pierre Charles L'Enfant. The first great statute of George Washington was the work of a French sculptor, Jean-Antoine Houdon. The first major study of us as a people, "Democracy in America", was written by a French historian, Alexis de Tocqueville. Published in 1835, it remains one of the wisest books ever written about we Americans. And, of course, our own Statue of Liberty was a gift from France.

The point here is that we need to think critically about what we read, what we hear, and what we say.

This is especially true about the Word of our God, the Bible. Thus, today's scripture readings deserve our critical attention.

Life is, of course, not neatly divided into right or wrong, good or evil. It is complex, and the parable in today's Gospel reflects the way God works with us in the midst of our uncertainty and doubt. On occasions in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) it does appear that God operates on the rule of "one strike and you are out". The story that immediately comes to mind is the eviction of Eve and Adam from the Garden of Eden. Yet on other occasions, as for example with King David, God appears only too eager to forgive and give people another chance.

In the parables of the kingdom, God is portrayed as gradually transforming people from within, allowing good and evil to flourish together and waiting patiently for the mysterious growth that occurs in the life cycle of seeds. God longs for us to choose the good. But God is not impatient. We are given time to develop all the skills and talents we have been endowed with so as to use them for the good.

Sometimes we act as though we have been created in total perfection, and the main aim of living is to avoid falling away from this pinnacle in any way. If we think like that, then inevitably we will live in constant fear of doing wrong or not measuring up to the high standards of our calling. Both the patterns of life and God's own expectations work differently.

We are certainly created in the image and likeness of God, but as we grow, we will at times grow straight and true, at times veer off on a tangent. This can be painful, it can be uncertain, it will certainly involve great changes in us, physically, mentally, and spiritually.

We are reminded of how a seed must break open its kernel and go through a variety of transformations until it reaches its full growth. We too undergo bewildering changes as we try to discern what we are called to be and to do in our lives. God waits patiently for this to happen, for God has given us the gift of our freedom, which allows us to stray as well as to grow true. When we find ourselves at our most erratic, we may remember that God has the habit of writing straight on crooked lines.