

16<sup>th</sup> Sunday per Annum - A  
Wisdom 12:13, 16-19;  
Romans 8:26-27;  
Matthew 13:24-30  
Little Flower - 7/19/20

My Brothers and Sisters,

If last Sunday's Gospel suggested that our response to God is affected by our openness to God's word, today's Gospel suggests that our faith is also affected by the existence of evil and sin.

In last Sunday's Gospel, Jesus told the parable of the sower and the seed. In today's Gospel, Jesus tells the parable of the good seed and the weeds. Here Jesus introduces another element into the equation, the reality of sin. The weeds might represent those who are bad influences on us. One of my high school classmates frequently said, "Tell me whom you go with, and I will tell you who you are." They might also represent a culture and media that are increasingly non-Christian and even non-religious and sometimes even anti-Christian and anti-religious. They might represent our own sinfulness and selfishness. The bottom line is that our response to God's word is affected not only by our openness to it but also by others, culture and the media, and our own sinfulness.

On a purely practical level, it seems to me that today's parable should also remind all of us how influenced we are by others and by our culture and the media. Most of us like to think that we think and act independently based on our own perceptions and values. Although certainly true to some extent, it is not completely true. Today we often hear the word *influencer*. Many of those on social media are referred to as influencers based on the number of followers they have. I would suggest that we might want to ask ourselves who and what are the influencers in our lives. The more aware we are of them, the more free we are.

The first reading reveals God and challenges us. The Book of Wisdom proclaims that although God is all powerful, he cares for all. Although God's power is the source of justice, God is lenient and judges mercifully. An alternative opening prayer in the former Sacramentary captured the truth of this reading: "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in your unbounded mercy, you have revealed the beauty of your power through your constant forgiveness of our sins." This reading from the Book of Wisdom should give us great hope and confidence.

The challenge comes at the end of the reading: "*And you taught your people, by these deeds, that those who are just must be kind; And you gave your sons good ground for hope that you would permit repentance for their sins.*" In other words, one of the constant Old Testament themes is that we must make God's values and God's ways of acting toward us our own values and our own ways of acting toward others. A punitive concept of justice is not God's justice. If we want to be just, we must be kind. Second, we should never despair of God's mercy and forgiveness.

In today's reading from his Letter to the Romans, St. Paul reminds us that the Holy Spirit living within us comes to the aid of our weakness. He suggests that when we pray, the Holy Spirit is praying with us. For many years, I have suggested that the best test of love or friendship is that two people consistently bring out the best in each other. In other words, lovers and friends call forth the best in each other. However, they call forth the best in each other from outside each other. The Holy Spirit living within us calls forth the best in us from within.

My brothers and sisters, although our response to God and God's word is affected by our openness to God's word, by others, by culture and the media, and by our own selfishness and sinfulness, we can be confident that we are never alone. God's Spirit lives within us calling forth the best in us. Likewise, we should be confident that when we sin, God will always be merciful and forgiving.