

## A GREAT NATION/A PEOPLE OF GOD

So, do you think, in your heart of hearts, that God really knows what is going on in our world? That God really cares about what is happening? That God is also involved in the lives of individuals? Communities? Even nations? Or that God knows but doesn't really care?

One of the main revelations we have received from the Old Testament and the New Testament is that there is but one God. It is this one God who has made all that is, including all of us. God has endured the rejection of the very human beings he created and placed on this earth and endowed with freedom. God has loved us anyway; so much so that He sent his beloved Son to become one of us and lead us back into the kingdom of God. We left that kingdom behind when we sinned and went our own way, cut off from the very Tree of Life.

God cares about each person and all people, communities and nations too. God cares about our world and what we do to it and all that happens here. God has never given up on us. God continues to plant the seeds of goodness and care everywhere on this planet. God speaks to us—directly, interiorly, indirectly, through signs and wonders, in the things that happen to us and the things we do. In nature. In world events. In the relationship between people of all kinds.

Recently I learned that there are 195 nations on this earth. Of all sizes and shapes and ethnicities. Some nations are rigid with their own people and with others too. Some nations are freedom loving and allow maximum freedoms to their people even if things do not always go so well and the freedom is not well used. Of all the nations on earth, I believe that there is something very unique that has been going on in our own country, the United States of America. From its beginning God had something special in mind for us. There is even a first person account from the winter of 1777 where General George Washington describes in his own words how he received a visit, an apparition, from a lady, luminous and strong, (perhaps the Blessed Mother?) who revealed to him the divine purpose of the country he and his fellow patriots were seeking to found. And God's desire for this country and protection of it as is proclaimed in the Bill of Rights. God was there at the beginning of our country. God is here now too.

In the Bill of Rights, we find a list of prohibitions, things that are forbidden to be done. But this list of prohibitions is not a list of things we as citizens are not allowed to do. You can find such lists in various countries. No. This list is a list of things that THE GOVERNMENT IS NOT ALLOWED TO DO TO US ITS PEOPLE. How different is that? How unique in all the 195 countries is that? What a huge difference: a majestic distinction. And that is why, with all our faults and flaws, people from so many other countries in the world still want to come here.

And how did this country come to be. Let me paraphrase what one Commentator wrote many years ago: He professed that the origin of this country grew out of a long, real-life journey. The eternal spark which gave life to this quest hearkens back to the biblical city of Bethlehem. A guiding star appeared there as a herald announcing the birth of the newborn King of the Jews. That star signified and magnified each human person well beyond what any human power could ever hope to do. That star was a sign of what God had created in each one of us and for each of us. It told us that we were made in the image of God and we were meant to be free.

It took a very long time before a nation came along that sought to enshrine, in the politics and culture of its people, this truth. America, I believe, is that country. But America cannot presume to offer itself up or present itself as the secular reflection of the Incarnation. We are not. But Americans can say, as President Lincoln did, that our country was founded on a proposition: that government of the people, by the people, and for the people is at the heart of our country's existence. And very much in conformity with the heart of God revealed in and through the Incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ.

This Fourth of July we are once again in a precarious moment in our country's history. It is still very much the case that people everywhere desire still to come to this country. They sense something very special here, very different here. Not at all perfect. But there is something here not found in a lot of other countries either. In today's first reading the prophet Ezekiel is told by God to speak his truth to the people and to continue to speak it even if the message is not heard or accepted. There were rebellious people at the time of Ezekiel. There are rebellious people today too. Speak his truth. That is our task. God's truth. Not something of our own making.

Saint Paul tells us about a weakness he experienced that actually came from God to prevent him from becoming arrogant and superior, it served to keep him humble. God told him that in Paul's weakness, God's power would be brought to perfection. Us too. At times, we too, as Americans, have been tempted to arrogance and feelings of superiority towards others. But many of us experience a weakness right now. In our weakness at this time, embraced for the sake of God and accepted as being given to us by God, God's power will be restored and will reign again in human hearts.

And in today's gospel passage, Jesus himself experienced rejection when he returned to where he grew up. He was not accepted and his message was not believed. Not right away. But over time God's truth has been properly sown and will begin to grow and blossom—then and now, there and here. We must remain faithful to that Truth in all its dimensions. That is our task on this Independence Day. The Lord has left himself to us as bread for our journey through the travails and challenges of this life. Let us be wise and turn to him this day. Lord feed your people, in our weakness, with the very Bread of Life.

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.