

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time “The Problem of Politics”

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Since we had the inauguration of a new president this week, I found a little story I think both democrats and republicans can enjoy. You see, many years from now, it seems that President Bush, President Obama, and President Trump all make their way to heaven on the same day. Because they are all into public service, God decides to interview each one of them to see what job God can employ them for in heaven. So, God begins by interviewing President Bush by asking him, “What do you believe in?” President Bush responds with, “Well, I believe in a strong America and freedom”. To which, God says, “Hey, that sounds good. You can sit at my right hand”. It is now President Obama’s turn to be interviewed and God asks him, “What do you believe in?” To which President Obama replies, “I believe in world peace and caring for the poor”. And God says, “That sounds good. You can sit at my left hand.” And now it is President Trump’s turn to be interviewed and God asks him, “What do you believe in?” To which President Trump responds, “I believe you are sitting in my chair!”

OK everyone, it is just a joke, just a little “Apprentice” humor! Please join me in praying for President Trump and for all our elected officials. I sincerely mean that. They really need our prayers and encouragement. As you know there is sadly a lot of division in our country today and the temptation is to pour gas on the fire. That is the nature of politics. Politics, politics, politics! The world is full of politics. And this is nothing new as you know. Division, differences of opinion, and the dangers associated with national politics are all rather ancient problems. In fact, I think it is very interesting that we see these matters addressed quite clearly in all three readings this weekend.

To begin with Isaiah, the highest moments for the Jews of the Old Testament were the Kingdoms of David and Solomon. Unfortunately, political tensions became so great in the Kingdom after Solomon that the Kingdom physically split into two nations. That happened. The north remained Israel and the South became Judah. Things got so bad that Judah formed an alliance with the Gentiles of Assyria to form an invasion army that wreaked havoc in Israel. It is this context that Isaiah prophesies a new King David and new Christos who would unite the people and cleanse them from all from their sins. How about that?

Meanwhile, in our second reading, Paul is just giving it to the Corinthians for forming competing factions of Christians, the church of Cephas, the church of Apollos, and to Paul’s horror, the church of Paul. To which Paul responds humorously, “Was Paul crucified for you? Were any of you baptized in the name of Paul?” Like I said last week, Paul’s answer to the splitting factions in Corinth was the Eucharist in chapter 11. What does being a Eucharistic people look like? Flip the page to chapter 12, one body of Christ, many parts, one body. What does one body of Christ look like? Chapter 13, a people who, at the end of the day, focus on three important characteristics of a Christian, someone with faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love. Paul is writing this because he is not seeing enough love in the hearts of the people in Corinth.

And so in our Gospel reading, Jesus is fulfilling what the prophet Isaiah said about him in the first reading, Jesus is preaching in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali. The point is Jesus, as messiah, is the light to all nations not just Israel. He brings together in his person that which was tossed apart. This is the literal meaning of the word symbol by the way. *Sym* means together, *ballein* is to throw. *Symballein* means to throw together that which was tossed apart. Jesus is the light of the nations, an incarnate symbol that throws together that which was tossed apart.

Contrast this word with another word, diabolic. The word diabolic comes from two words, *dia* meaning across/apart and *ballein*, meaning to throw. And this is something we humans always seem to need to watch out for. You see, it is a diabolic spirit that can split nations like Judah and Israel apart. It is diabolic spirit that can toss a town like Corinth apart. It is a destructive spirit that can rip a country, community or even a church apart. The same destructive spirit can tear families apart, marriages apart, and souls apart. We need to stand guard against this kind of spirit wherever it manifests itself. And so, what is the answer to *diaballein*? Well, *symballein*, Jesus Christ, the light to all nations, the divine healer who brings all things together in Himself.

What does the Light of the World require of us? Jesus says, “Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand.” As many of you recall, the word for repent in English is impoverished. The Greek is *metanoia*. *Meta* means transcend, *nous* means mind. When Jesus says repent, he means everything you know is wrong, transcend your current way of seeing things, and lose the myopia of egotism so to gain a new vision of the world in light of the Kingdom of God. By the waters of baptism, we are citizens of the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom that will one day bring together all nations peacefully into Christ at the end of time. It is from the viewpoint of the eternal Kingdom of God that we are called to see all our relationships and even our politics.

My friends, during any period of government transition, it is good to be reminded that the Kingdom of God transcends any particular political party. The Kingdom of God isn't left winged or right winged. The Kingdom of God is *symballein*, a Kingdom of the baptized followers of Jesus Christ. We are disciples who live in the world but are not of it, disciples who are forces for good in the world in every facet of society, as we make our pilgrimage together to everlasting life by following Jesus who is the way, the truth and the life.