

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

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Scripture: Mt. 5:1-12

"The Sleeping Giant Gets a Wake-up Call! – How will you respond?" (part 2)

ALL SAINTS' DAY AND ELECTION DAY

Today we celebrate All Saints' Day. Even though the official day in the Church Calendar is November 1, it is moved to the closest Sunday following the 1st. It is the day that we celebrate the saints of old and their examples of faith. On All Saints' Sunday we always hear the words Christ began in His Sermon on the Mount – the Beatitudes. These are the characteristics that should be reflected in a believer's life and in the life of the Church. Let's look at them again for a moment and contrast them with what we have seen this past year in our nation during the election season:

Mt. 5:1-12: "When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. 2He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying,

3"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. In other words, blessed are those who are humble and recognize their need for God and salvation.

4"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. A reference to those who are sorry for their sin and repent.

5"Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. Those who are kind to and considerate of others.

6"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Those who seek after the righteousness of God – that means right motives and right actions for doing things.

7"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Those who are willing to forgive others as they have been forgiven by God.

8"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. The only way to be pure in heart is to have God purify you. That comes from a transforming relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

9"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Those who have been reconciled to God and therefore are at peace with Him (through accepting Christ as one's Lord and Savior) and now can be peacemakers in the lives of others and in their own relationships.

10"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Even with all of these wonderful attributes that flow from a godly attitude, we will find that such expressions of divine truth and love will clash with the world's ways. Why? The way of the world is man-centered, not God-centered. The way of the world is about exalting self. But when the self-centered "me first" attitude takes over, it always leads to tyranny. It always leads to oppression because government that is man-centered will always lead to control over the masses. And it will not be a just or fair control. Jesus said in **Jn. 7:7**, "**the world hates Me because I testify that its works are evil.**" He said in **Jn. 15:18**, "**If the world hates you, know that it hated Me before it hated you.**"

Do you want to experience this hate? Go to North Korea. Do you want to see persecution? Go to the Middle East. Do you want to be insulted and ridiculed for your belief in Christ? Go to any non-Christian university or college in America.

And yet Jesus says again, in v.11, ***"Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. 12"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."***

So there will be conflict for standing up for what is right. Jesus said, ***"Don't think I have come to bring peace, I have come to bring a sword to even divide families."*** While the sword may represent division, I believe it represents the source of that division. And that is the Word of God. The Word of God is called a two-edged sword in **Hebrews 4:12**. And it is this sword that comes from the very mouth of Christ, Himself. Please turn with me to **Rev. 1**. ***In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.*** Here is the vision of the Son of Man that John sees of the Lord. Note the imagery of the sword.

Now turn over to Rev. 2:12-16: ***"The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this: 13 'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. 14'But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality. 15'So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16'Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth."***

Do you see how Christ reveals himself to the church in Pergamum? They were faithful, some even to death. But there were others who had been seduced into false religion following folks who said it was okay to be followers of Jesus and to engage in the pagan practices and activities of the city. It was okay to sacrifice food to idols and to engage in fornication with the temple prostitutes.

Even the name Nicolaitan comes from the Greek which means to *conquer the people*. So too the prophet's name *Balaam*. Is it a coincidence? I don't believe so. Man-made religion and man-centered government seeks to do exactly that. To control the masses by getting them to conform. The nature of government is just like the nature of man – because it is the corporate expression of man – it views itself as God. We see that tendency way back in Genesis 10 with Nimrod and then in Genesis 11 with the building of the Tower of Babel.

And so throughout history there has been this predisposition to rule over others by brute force and then the pressure those who are being subjugated to conform to the laws of that society. And if those laws aren't grounded in the true Lawgiver, God, oppression will not only result but increase!

That is why our Founding Fathers sought to put limits on government. They saw firsthand how absolute rule corrupts absolutely. They understood that government must derive its power from the people who were under the rule of God's laws. But government must also have in its ranks men and women of character. It's why Daniel Webster observed, *"if the citizens neglect their Duty and place unprincipled men*

in office, the government will soon be corrupted; laws will be made, not for the public good so much as for selfish or local purposes; corrupt or incompetent men will be appointed to execute the Laws; the public revenues will be squandered on unworthy men; and the rights of the citizen will be violated or disregarded."

That is what we have seen during the last 50 years. \$20 Trillion in debt, porous borders, a continued drug epidemic, the growing legalization of pot without a cohesive plan to deal with the problems that legalization will make, and an entitled attitude of the politicians to keep their office regardless of the needs of their citizens. Moreover, the Founding Fathers did not want leadership to be kept in one family! They already saw that with royalty - where one family keeps control over the nation. It would have happened with the Kennedys if their lives were not so tragically taken – JFK and RFK assassinated, JFK Jr. – killed in a plane crash. Only Teddy made it and did he ever! - nearly 40 years in office. And then we had the Bushes and maybe even another Bush if Jeb had made it, and now we have the Clintons. In my humble opinion, we should not have dynasties running the country! It reflects two things – laziness on the part of the country and too much influence by certain elites in our nation.

WHAT THIS ELECTION HAS SHOWN

Now continuing with my opinion (this is not Gospel but only my personal thoughts), this election has shown something else – the utter hypocrisy and double standards of the media, the political establishment, and Hollywood. And it goes back to the spirit of the land I mentioned last week. At the end of the day, it is this self-centered, I am god attitude, and I determine what is right and wrong that has gripped the nation. And it will really not lead to freedom but oppression. Why? Because if you are selfishly-driven, you will do all in your power to maintain control. In other words, it's my way or no way.

Why do you think our nation is so divided and no one is even cooperating in Washington? And do you think it will change if one or the other presidential candidate wins on Tuesday? As I said last week, we are a divided and angry nation. The challenge for the Church of Jesus Christ is to look at what is going on around us and not be surprised, but to take note, realize Jesus said it would be so, and to do something about it that is constructive, first in our day-to-day lives and then as the Body of Christ.

You see, we can get upset and overwhelmed with all that is happening. Our 24/7 news cycle doesn't help. But much of it is out of our control. So what is God concerned about? What we do in our own worlds? How do we change the world? By first changing our own world. How do we do that? By getting our own house in order and by responding in a way that is Christ-like and God-centered. And we saw some ways of doing that last week. Do you remember what they were? 1) control your anger and use it to work for good 2) control your tongue – as James writes in **James 1:19**, ***"Be slow to anger, slow to speak and quick to listen"*** 3) the vital necessity of a prayer life and finally to know the issues and vote. Finally, we need to know what is going on in our communities and land and to do our part.

We can't do this as lone rangers. We can do this by being an integral part of a local church. And I want to talk more about that next week. But since the election is only two days away, I want to close with the choices set before us and why we need to be in prayer no matter who wins. The truth is both candidates have serious character flaws. Both are two folks I don't think many of us would have over for dinner in

light of their behavior. And yet, if you have two candidates with faulty character, that in effect cancels each of them out. What is left? You need to find out where they stand on the issues of the day.

The truth is there is one candidate who is adamantly pro-choice to the point of supporting partial-birth abortion in the last trimester of pregnancy, both when her husband became president and even when its prohibition was finally passed in the Republican-controlled Congress in 2003 when she was a Senator. The law was challenged but the Supreme Court upheld the ban by a 5-4 majority, thanks to conservative justices who were picked by President George W. Bush.

When Planned Parenthood was found guilty of promoting the sale of aborted baby parts, Hillary Clinton doubled down on her support for abortion. She has stated that the most important right a woman has is the right to choose because it is "her body."

Now since it is All Saints Sunday, let's now hear from another woman who just recently was officially beatified as a saint in the Roman Catholic Church, Mother Theresa. She said, *"We must not be surprised when we hear of murders, of killings, of wars, of hatred. If a mother can kill her own child, what is left but for us to kill each other."*

She also said, *"It is a poverty to decide that a child must die so that you may live as you wish."* *"Abortion kills twice. It kills the body of the baby and it kills the conscience of the mother. Abortion is profoundly anti-women. Three quarters of its victims are women: Half the babies and all the mothers."*

There is one candidate who is currently under two criminal investigations by the FBI.

There is one candidate who believes people are irredeemable, forgetting that God is the only One in the redeeming business! He is the ONLY ONE who can make that determination.

There is only one candidate who said last year that society has to get those religious folks who are pro-life to *"change the way they think!"*

And then there is another candidate who is pro-life, pro-religious liberty, and will select Supreme Court Justices that adhere to the Constitution and do not re-interpret law and legislate from the bench. He has surrounded himself with a number of godly men and women who are committed followers of Jesus Christ – Governor Mike Huckabee, Dr. Ben Carson, Governor Mike Pence, to name a few. He is willing to listen to them and stand for Christian principles.

So from my vantage point as a Christian and as a priest, there is a stark contrast in world views between these two candidates. This is a choice between two visions, not just two characters! And the choice is ours. In the end, the best we can do is to pray and vote our conscience, knowing that it is the Lord who ultimately decides who will rule! And whatever happens, God is still King! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!