

24th Sunday After Pentecost, November 11, 2007, Liturgical Year "C"

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY

The Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward, Jr. + Rector

"What Really Matters"

ELECTION DAY

Last Tuesday we witnessed another Election Day. And I find it interesting that Election Day and Veteran's Day are in the same week. I think this is significant. It is because of those who serve in our nation's armed forces that we have the freedoms we have today. So before I go any further, I want to recognize our veterans. Thank you for your service to our nation. You are all, especially those who have served in our nation's wars, an inspiration.

Now getting back to Election Day; other than the contest for Erie County Executive, it was an uneventful affair. Next year however, will be different. Next year we will be electing a new President and a new Congress. And in the coming months we will be bombarded with political ads, commentary, and views.

And what does the latest Washington Post- ABC News poll have to say about the mood of the country? The poll found that over 75% of Americans feel the country is headed in the wrong direction. It's the highest public dissatisfaction in ten years, and as a result, most Americans want the new President to chart a different course.

You know it's interesting in my forty years I would say the majority of the time, the citizens of our nation has been dissatisfied with the direction the country is going. There always seems to be something wrong. Things are never going to seem right, because that's just the nature of our world. Even though democracy seems to be the best form of government, it is not the answer to our problems.

In fact, democracy is only as successful as the people it represents and the public officials who represent the people. That's why James Madison, often considered the architect of the US Constitution," declared, "*We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it. We have staked the future of all of our political institutions upon the capacity of mankind for self-government, upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves, to control ourselves, to sustain ourselves, according to the Ten Commandments of God.*" In other words, democracy will only be successful and survive if it is based upon and honors the laws of God.

RISE OF CHRISTIAN ACTIVISM

Now we have seen over the last 25 years many Christians take an activist roll in politics. And there is nothing wrong with such activism. But this activism has intimidated and irritated many of the elite of our nation –those in our universities, in Hollywood, and in the news media. I am reminded of the recent cover article to Sunday's the New York Times Magazine which pronounced the demise of the religious right in America. On the editorial page, writer Frank Rich, concluded his article with the words, "*Inauguration Day 2009 is at the very least Armageddon for the reigning ayatollahs of the American right.*"

Let me just say the “Christian Right” is a term made up by those same elites I just mentioned. It’s a way to stigmatize and marginalize anyone who believes that there are certain values that are integral to the fabric of our nation. Values and laws that are derived from the Holy Scriptures and which were espoused by our Founding Fathers. While such folks are entitled to their opinion, they are mistaken to think that most Christian believers in our country believe a certain political party is the answer. That’s not the answer.

CHRISTIAN MONARCHISTS

If you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, if you are a true Christian, you can be registered as a Republican, Democrat or Independent, but politically you can be none of the above. As Father Amend mentioned in his sermon a few weeks ago, if you are a Christian you are ultimately a monarchist. You are looking forward to the coming of the King of kings and Lord of lords, Jesus Christ! He is the only answer to our personal problems. He is the only answer to our societal problems, and He is the only answer to our political problems.

We always need to remember this when we talk about politics. And we need to remember this when we talk about religion. Some say don’t talk religion and politics. That’s a cop out. And then some say that so and so got religion, or that we need more religion. Our nation doesn’t need more religion, nor does our world. There is plenty of religion to go around. What our nation and what our world needs is a real relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. That’s why Jesus came – He came to restore our relationship with the Living God.

That, my friends, is the best way to change our world. And it’s why there is the Great Commission. Jesus said in **Mt. 28:18-19**, ***“Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all that I commanded you...”*** And we do that one person at a time, beginning with ourselves.

That’s what really matters.

HOW TO BE A GOOD CITIZEN

Now as Christians we are called to be good citizens. The Bible is clear about this. Now realize when Jesus walked the earth, when Paul was preaching and teaching, they were doing it in the context of the Roman Empire. Caesar ruled. He was thought to be a god. You know it’s interesting if you go through much of human history you will find this tendency in peoples. They have a king and they believe their king to be a god or a descendant of a god: such examples include the Pharaoh of Egypt, the Caesars of Rome, the Chinese Emperor, and up until the end of WW2 the Japanese Emperor. Even the people of Israel wanted a king though they knew he was not a god for Yahweh was their God. And even in the Christian nations of Europe there developed what was called, “the divine right of kings” where the king was not god but he ruled with God’s approval.

I believe that there has been this phenomenon of kingship because deep within the human heart there is a desire to be lead by a king. But any human being as king will fail because of sin. For there is only One who is completely righteous and powerful and just and that is God himself. And it will be God in the flesh, the Lord Jesus Christ who will reign and rule forever when He establishes His Kingdom at His Return.

But Satan seeks to put in a counterfeit to get men to buy into a lie. And even though there was a counterfeit in the person of Caesar, Jesus and Paul told us not only to wait and look forward to the day that God’s Kingdom is established once and for all, but they told us exactly how to live and be good citizens. Here are five key points to always remember:

Point 1: Do not grumble or complain – Nowhere in the New Testament does it say to grumble and complain about the political system. In fact, Paul writes in **Philippians 2:14** ***“Do all things without grumbling or disputing...”*** Think about it. How is complaining and grumbling about the problems of our society and government going to do you any good? It won’t. It will make you more frustrated and angry.

Point 2: Do not worry. We can worry about the future, the economy, wars and rumors of war. There’s a lot to worry about, isn’t there? But who has ever overcome a problem or difficulty by worrying? That’s why Jesus said, ***“Don’t worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will eat. Can you by worrying add a single hour to you life? But seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”*** (Mt. 6:25-34).

Point 3: Pray for those in authority over you. Paul says us in **1 Tim. 2:1-3**: ***“First of all then I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.”*** There is power in prayer otherwise we would not be told to do it. And this is especially the case when praying for our nation and its leaders.

Point 4: Obey the laws of the land – as long as they are not telling you to do evil or wrong we are to obey them. (**READ Romans 13:1-8**). Notice what Paul writes. Obeying the laws of the land means voting and paying taxes. Jesus affirmed paying taxes when He said, ***“Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s .”*** (Mt. 22:15-22). But He also told us to render to God the things that are God’s. And this leads us to the final and most important point.

Point 5: Be active in the body of Christ – that means taking part in the worship, maintenance, and ministry of the Church to which you belong. When we worship God, when we bring our children up in the faith, when we support the work of ministry that is how we change the world. That is how we render to God the things that are God’s!

Am I concerned about what happens in Washington DC and Albany? Yes. But I can only do so much as it relates to my government. However, as it relates to my fellow citizens I can do so much more. I can be the light of Christ and the salt of the earth.

JESUS ‘08

You know the best friend of my wife got an idea from the Lord earlier this year. Her pastor was speaking on how Christ is the hope for our nation, not a certain political party or philosophy. And she thought that creating a bumper sticker that said ***“JESUS ‘08: In God We Trust”*** would be a good way to show others wherein lies our trust and our hope. It has also the verse **2 Chron. 7:14**. Such bumper stickers will be available here at the church if you would like one.

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It's a great reminder that no political party or candidate is the answer to our nation's needs. There is only One King, King Jesus. He is the only One who can change and transform the lives of our nation's leaders and citizens. He is the only One who is the answer. So as we put Him first in our lives may we always strive to be godly citizens of this United States of America. In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!