

2ORDA

“They say” one should never discuss religion or politics if you want to get along when you meet someone, at least until you get to know them better. The safer topic is always the weather. Of course, currently we could find some real difference in opinion regarding this winter’s weather. Some are very happy it has been warmer with limited snow, although that has changed a little today, and some are bemoaning the fact they have not been able to go skiing, ice skating, tobogganing, or enjoy some other outdoor winter activity.

Other than knowing that the beauty of this earth and the challenges of living here in this life are due to the fallen nature of humanity, we can set aside weather for today. That leaves us with religion and politics. Do you remember the politics of the first Christmas as we just heard proclaimed in the Gospel passages from Christmas day until the Epiphany of the Lord? Politics required Joseph and the pregnant Virgin Mary to travel to Bethlehem. Politics required the Magi stop and check in with King Herod, the local ruler, when seeking the newborn King of the Jews. Politics led them to return by a different route, and politics forced the Holy Family to flee to Egypt to avoid the massacre of the Innocent Children.

Our first Scripture passage today is part of one of Isaiah’s Servant Songs. If we were ever to find the ideal politician, that person would be a servant of the people. In this passage the servant has been called from the time of his conception in the womb to grow to restore the people after exile to a nation, to lead them as a nation that is a light to other nations. They are to be a nation that is an example of righteousness and a nation that honors God. We can take just a peek forward to the Gospel and see that John the Baptist will recognize Jesus as God’s chosen one, for the second time! Remember, John had leaped in Elizabeth’s womb when Mary had visited Elizabeth while pregnant with Jesus.

If we were to have the wonderment of a new outlook on government from a truly Godly point of view, what would you think of using today’s Psalm response as the oath of office. “Here am I, Lord; I come to do Your will...to do Your will is my delight...I announced Your justice...Your law is within my heart...I did not restrain my lips...”? What a difference the soundbites would be on the evening news!

We all know there was no evening news at the time of John the Baptist and Jesus. In the place of such reporting, Saint John’s Gospel gives us a vivid picture of this encounter. “Behold, the Lamb of God...” The Lamb of God title appears in the Gospels only in Saint John’s Gospel. That same title, Lamb of God, appears twenty-nine times in his Book of Revelation, the last book in the Bible.

This Lamb of God takes away the sins of the world, not just the sins of those who hear John the Baptist preaching, not just the people of Israel, not just those who are alive at the time Jesus lived. The world! And the picture is so vivid that when the Baptist points and says, “It is He!” they listen. They accept his testimony. There is no record

afterwards of people asking where John the Baptist is so they can go back to him. There is no record of people saying that they bemoan John's death because they are soured on Jesus. Even after Jesus' death, no one forms a following for John the Baptist. Those who were not concerned with the ways of the politicians of the day, with the power-seeking egos in the limelight sought the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Early Christians saw the face and heart of God in Jesus Christ. When Christianity was at its best, when its at its best now, it has the face and heart of Jesus Christ. It brings out the best in everyone and everything. When its at its worst, it is faceless and heartless. Once we have seen Jesus, we have seen what everything else can become. His whole being is so inviting!

Holiness begins on the inside. Sometimes we don't get excited about our call to holiness because we have a distorted idea about what holiness is, just as we have a distorted perception of the world of politics or at least what politics could be. I found a great illustration of holiness, contrasting the lack or presence of holiness in humanity to a stage set and Romanesque architecture.

When the curtain opens at the theatre, it reveals a magnificent stage set. But no one can live in those buildings. It's just a facade. That's our culture - so attractive on the outside, but so often disappointing on the inside.

Romanesque style churches, built in the Dark Ages and still standing, are different. Constructed with thick walls of stone on the outside there was almost no exterior decoration. But inside, you are surrounded by glittering gold mosaics, shining marble columns, and exquisite, inspiring works of art.

That's holiness - on the outside it looks plain and tough, but that plainness is strength, the strength that protects an interior life that shines and glistens from floor to ceiling with breathtaking jewels of wisdom, virtue, and indestructible joy.

From one of these models you will find the seeker of earthly power and glory. From the other, you will find the Christian seeking the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the World.

Saint Paul looked at this very issue when he wrote his First Letter to the Corinthians. Today we heard his opening greeting, to those called to be holy, to all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. In this letter, Saint Paul will go on to point out to the Corinthians that they must be united with all Christians, that they are not one local church who can make up their own doctrine separately from the universal Church. Each congregation does not get to decide what God wants.

We need to realize that. Each congregation does not get to decide what God wants any more than any politician gets to decide what God wants. God decides.

God created life and saw it was good. God created human life and gave a commandment that it should not be killed. God had a mission for the servant of Isaiah's

prophecy from the time he was in his mother's womb. God's Son, Jesus, while in His mother's womb was greeted by his cousin John the Baptist while he was in his mother's womb.

During His lifetime, Jesus showed great compassion for the sick and suffering, teaching the need for respect for each human life. He made sure that His mother, Mary, would be cared for in her old age after He left this earth.

This coming Friday will be the forty-seventh annual March for Life in Washington, D.C. While its focus is on the crime of abortion, we must remember to have a consistent ethic of life from conception to natural death. Currently there is a bill in the Ohio legislature that would provide for the death penalty for doctors performing an abortion. That is absolutely contrary to a consistent ethic of life.

Politicians may want to separate God's plan from the realm of issues that they must confront. Or, they may want to ignore God's commandment and put their own interests or the interests of people who want to ignore God's commandment first, the people who will give those politicians power and glory that is to be reserved to God alone.

May Saint Paul's plea to the Corinthian's and to us be heard loud and strongly today that we may be one in faith, one in holiness, and one with all everywhere who call upon our Lord Jesus Christ.