

Dear Parish Family,

We trudge toward the general election in November. Many of you are probably already tired of the incivility that seems so common this year and in recent elections. The polarization of politics, the contested election of 2000, the war in Iraq, the battle about gay marriage, ideological news reporting, and the debate about the role of religion in politics have all contributed to the state of affairs. Where does the Church fit into all of this?



The early Church and individual Christians had little to do with the politics of the Roman Empire. At the time of the establishment of the Church, the Roman Republic had become the Roman Empire. Governors of the provinces were appointed either by the Senate or Emperor, thus called either senatorial or imperial provinces. Citizens had a very limited input into the political process, especially as compared to the political participation we are used to in our country. Furthermore, Christians were under suspicion and were sporadically persecuted by neighbors and by the government.

St. Paul reminds the Roman Christians that government is instituted by God (Romans 13). Christians are to obey the law and pay taxes. Caesar protects citizens in the wielding of the sword. St. Peter reminds the addressees of his first letter that they are to obey those in authority (1 Peter 2). Later, Christian apologists like Saint Justin in the Second Century, wrote letters to those in authority to persuade them that Christians were not lawbreakers or a threat to the Empire but were law-abiding citizens.

In the Fifth Century after Christianity had become legal, Saint Augustine wrote his greatest work, The City of God. Reflecting Cicero's work, De Res Publica, Augustine agreed that a true republic maintained justice and sought the welfare of the citizens. A political association is a republic only when the true God is worshiped. (An interesting thought when thinking about our own country.) Justice is not possible without the worship of the true God. Augustine concluded that Rome had not been a true republic by this definition. She had a lust for domination rather than a thirst for justice. Rome was only a faint semblance of a true republic.

St. Augustine's primary concern was with the City of God, that band of pilgrims gathered in the Church who were traveling to the celestial city. The City of God is the true republic, which worships the true God and does justice. In that City is found true happiness, the enjoyment of God and of each other in God. The City of God includes the Church in pilgrimage and heaven itself. Only in heaven, where angels and humans are in true fellowship, is the republic all that it was meant to be.

Luther spoke of two kingdoms, the temporal and the spiritual. The temporal government had the responsibility of attending to earthly affairs. The Church preached God's Word and administered the Sacraments. In good conscience Christians could participate in government and serve in the military. Luther wrote tracts directed to temporal authorities to remind them of their duty.

Christians in America may participate in the political process. In our republic we have many rights such as freedom of speech, the right of assembly, a free press, and the right to vote. The Church at times will address the government on matters of central concern to Christians, but the Church should not identify with any political party. Unfortunately, some have associated faith with a political party. It is a temptation we must resist. Such a temptation is certainly to be avoided in the pulpit.

It would be good for us during this election season to bring civility to our discussions of politics both with believers and non-believers. Most pundits and candidates will not do the same. Our civility in discussing the issues would be a great contribution and example in a bitter election year. More importantly, by proclaiming Christ, we may draw non-believers into the only true republic, the City of God.

In Christ,

Pastor Mike & Pastor Mandy