

Election 2020

St Martha's, Bethany Beach

November 8, 2020

Wisdom of Solomon 6:12-16

Psalm 70

1 Thess. 4:13-18

Matthew 25:1-13

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

There was advice given years ago, to priests, which is to preach from the pulpit with a Bible in one hand and a copy of the New York Times in the other. I never really followed that advice, for several reasons. Newspapers never cover every important story - for example, a long war in the Democratic Republic of Congo has claimed over seven million lives - when do you remember ever reading about that? I used to include this country in prayers of the people, although most people were ignorant of what was happening there.

Another reason for avoiding speaking about current affairs is that these days every thing seems to have a political slant, and I never thought parishioners would be interested to hear my political views. I still feel that way, and every time I stand up to preach, I ask myself the question, "will what I am about to say draw people closer to Jesus Christ?" Political controversies are sometimes best left to the experts who write opinion columns in the papers. A priest has something different to offer.

Having said all of that, it would be remiss of me to make no mention of the election that took place last week. A preacher is often called upon to relate the gospel to the lives of the parishioners - what does God have to say to us in our current situation?

We have a winner, at last, in our presidential race. The counting of votes in some states took several days but at last it seems that the people have spoken. Joe Biden will be the next President. Let us now all move on and forget the rancor of the last four years. Ah, how I wish that were so! You may be aware that allegations of voter fraud have been made with regard to the election. I pass no comment on whether or not this is true, but the fact is that many believe it to be so. The perception of fraud can be as corrosive as actual fraud. It doesn't help that a partisan media wants to refute all accusations before they are investigated. Years ago, journalists would investigate such claims, but now, it seems, that is no longer their job.

There is a growing perception among half of the voters in this country that something is not quite right with the election result. It's not just sour grapes. They are people who increasingly do not trust the government and do not trust the media. They are not a minority, as the media likes to portray them, neither are they stupid. They will not take well to being told the new President is legitimate, especially after the media has told them the previous one wasn't, and for two years were told a lie that the President colluded with the Russians to rig the last election. They will be criticized relentlessly by the media, who will blame them for the divisions in the country. They will be labeled as "racist", although among their number is the largest proportion of minority groups in voting history. They are people who care about their country and care about the integrity of the voting process.

I don't want to put a damper on the celebrations for those who voted for Joe Biden. If the vote was fair, then he deserves to be President and the country should unite behind him. But there may well be unrest on the streets in the coming months, especially if firm evidence of voter

fraud emerges. Our civil society depends on free and fair elections and the ordered transfer of power. But if one side feels defrauded, what then?

Christians need to work out where they stand in all of this. It won't be enough to say, "Well, we got rid of the bad orange man, and any way we did that is fine with me." That's saying the means justifies the ends, which is the motto of all totalitarian regimes. I know that President Trump is hated with a passion by many. But hatred is a corrosive emotion when nurtured and held for so long. When you turn people into demons - which is what the media has done for the past four years with President Trump, - it turns other people a little crazy. They call the president evil, vile and the leader of a fascist dictatorship. Perhaps the highest example of what is called Trump Derangement Syndrome came last week, when a Yale associate professor - a psychiatrist - said that Trump was not like Hitler; he was worse - at least, she said, Hitler had his good points. What follows is the thought that, if your opponent is Hitler, then you are justified to use any means possible to remove him.

Christians need to stand against this kind of thinking, and the misuse of language, and not be tempted to go along with it. It applies to both sides of the argument, whether it is uttered by an opponent of Trump or by Trump himself. What should our Christian response be? Don't we claim to see Christ in every person?

Christians also need to stand up for the truth. The truth has been having a hard time lately. Recently we have witnessed censorship on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, and I have begun to ask myself what country we are living in - is it America or the Soviet Union? The governor Pontius Pilate asked "What is Truth?" The answer is that we see and hear truth in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. That means we make a commitment to keep the commandments, which includes the commandment not to lie, and following Jesus also means to call out the lie and the concealing of truth when it happens. In our current, tense political climate, it also means not to demonize those who do not share our political views.

I don't know about you, but I'm worn out by the past week. Actually, the past year has been difficult. What a strange year 2020 has been! And it's not over yet. Our political story will continue to create anxiety in the weeks and months ahead. Try not to get sucked into all the negativity that is bound to increase. Avoid getting involved in the name calling and the labeling of others, which is usually evidence that you are losing the argument.

Instead do something to make you feel good. Celebrate the blessings of this life, and remember that there is a God in heaven whose sovereignty is over all people, Presidents and Congress included. Please pray for your country in the weeks and months ahead. None of us want civil unrest, but I can't help but feel that there are darker forces at play in our political life. I'm sure there always have been.

Christians keep the faith, promote peace and renounce violence. I challenge you all to find a member of an opposing political party and listen to their story, rather than sticking a label on them. Work for reconciliation, even in your own small patch. We are the example the world needs right now.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Father David Beresford