

PEACEMAKERS



Matthew 5:9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

Sadly, as we all know, we live in a divided nation --- and that is never more evident than in a presidential election year. The news stations clearly divide the map with the blue states on the one side and the red states on the other, and throughout this election season, supporters from the two parties have seemed pitted against each other in what one commentator called "an election of doom," where each side warns that if the other side wins, we are doomed, literally. It has been personally painful for me to read the hate-filled posts of different friends of mine on Facebook where there is an absence of civil discourse. The bitter animosity in this election is overwhelming at times. In fact scanning one's social media these days is actually called "doom scrolling." There are so many personal

attacks, such mean insults, very abusive language, name calling, outrageous claims, untruths, intolerance and disrespect --- and sometimes there has been even a clash on policies, but it is mostly just personal. What one journalist called "negative partisanship," where most of us are not voting so much for some policy or some person, but we are simply opposed to the other candidate, who has been so demeaned by the other side, that they should be locked up. The media has sadly fostered these divisions at times, depending upon what news channel you watch. We have the Coastal elites on the shores versus the simply folk of Middle America on the Great Plains; or our multi-cultural cities pitied against the rural homogenous countryside. And which of these is the real America, that's the question often asked? There is real fear out there of violence, of intimidation, of social unrest, racial injustice, and even talk of civil war. And there is certainly some real fear-mongering going on as well. We are sadly a divided nation. And self-righteousness is the greatest danger here, both in politics and in religion. Self-righteousness is what really divides, when one side or another think they alone know the truth, they alone control the facts, and know what to do.

So what exactly is the Church's role in all of this? What are we as good Christians supposed to do in the midst of all this acrimony and anxiety? Are we to self-righteously take one

side or the other in this political divide? Are we to justly condemn the views of one party and claim God for the other? Or are we to avoid political discussions altogether, as so many suggest, in order to keep the peace? But there is no peace. Still there should be no politics in the church, some say. I have been told many times over the years that clergy are not supposed to talk about politics, that we have a separation of church and state in this country. Sometimes it is just a kind parishioner whispering the advice quietly, just so you knew. Other times I have been forewarned with a finger pointing at my face and voices quivering in anger. And I have often wondered how many other parishioners believed the same thing and simply said nothing at all. The warning is clearly stated: "There is no place for politics in the pulpit."

But Politics is about how we organize our common life together, so that as a church, as a community of believers, wherever two or three of us are gathering together, we must be able to talk about politics, about how we order our community values, that is what the Gospel is all about. I am not talking about partisanship here, I am talking about politics. I have never preached partisanship in my forty years as a priest. I am not interested in promoting one political party over against another. That is not the place of the Church. So what is the role of the Church in the midst of all this angry politics?

As I hope as you all, that question is answered in the Catechism. The Mission of the Church as clearly stated there is the reconciliation of all people to each other and to God, through Christ Jesus our Lord. Our ministry is one of reconciliation says Paul, not division. We are all part of the one Body of Christ, and as Paul notes, one part of the body cannot say to another, I have no need of you. For we have need of each other if we ever wish to be whole. We cannot avoid politics if we are really interested in reconciliation. We should be promoting conversation and dialogue between the two parties in this country. The Church should be involved in bringing us together as a people, as a nation, as a community, especially on the eve of our divisive national election this Tuesday.

If we really want to be peacemakers, then we need to be able to hear and to understand each other's concerns, and each other's fears. I believe that the role of the Christian Church at this point in our history has never been more important to our life as a nation. We are meant to help bridge the divide between us, to lead by example, to reconcile, to break down barriers that divide us, to cool temperatures, to foster civil dialogue, and to encourage us all to respect the dignity of every human being. The Church, I believe, has a unique and essential role in our country to further this much needed

political conversation right now, to be a safe place where we trust each other enough to actually listen to each other, to hear different points of view with respect, so that there can be reconciliation and peace among us.

As our Guidelines for Dialogue read, "it is okay for us to disagree; that we can love each other as Christians and not hold the same opinion on everything." How boring would that be if we did always agree? However it is NOT okay for us to dismiss or denigrate viewpoints that are simply different from our own. We must not shame, blame, or criticize self or others, if we are to be agents of reconciliation. We can disagree with ideas, but not with people. We need to use "I" statements to express our opinions, our thoughts, and our feelings, and NOT use objective statements as though we are self-righteously declaring the truth for all. And then we need to listen to the other side, to 'try on' different views and perspectives, to hear the opinions, thoughts and feelings of others, and then strive to use "both/and" language, to hold together the larger truth than any one of us holds alone.

This is our primary role as Christians, to help bring peace and reconciliation to our land. Not to divide the righteous people from the sinners and tax-collectors, but to bring all the people together around one table, one altar, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of us all.

So this Wednesday, we must fervently pray for President-elect, whomever that may be, and to pray for all those in authority. And we must love and respect them not only with our lips but in our lives. We must honor the concerns of those Americans who elected them, as well as those who did not. We need to listen to one another, not out of arrogance or judgment, but with open minds and hearts, as peacemakers, as the children of God.

So I do not want for us to come to church on Sundays and avoid political talk. Rather I want for us to come to church on Sundays to BE THE CHURCH, pursuing the reconciliation of all people, all people, not just those who look like us, who think like us, who speak the same language as we do. I do not want our church to become a ghetto or a gated community, but instead to be a place where all are truly welcome. I want for us to respect the dignity of every human being, as we promised at our Baptism, to find the image of God in each other, to see face of Jesus in the stranger and foreigner in our midst. Later in this chapter from Matthew, Jesus says "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love

you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?" What Jesus asks of us is not easy to do. It takes practice. It takes time, but it must be done, not avoided. It is our duty, our vocation, our responsibility as Christians.

So let us get on with the task at hand, for sadly there is a great divide in our nation, and many people are frightened and hurting. Our response to this should be clear, and compassionate, not self-righteous. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God. AMEN.