

Election Day: A Tale of Two Kingdoms

Tuesday, November 6th, was “election day.” The results will affect our nation, our states, our counties, our districts, our cities, our towns, and our villages. On Tuesday, November 13th, in Parma OH, there will be an election affecting our Orthodox Church in America, our dioceses, our deaneries, our parishes, and our faithful. In some ways, these elections are similar. But fundamentally, they could not be more different. In my opinion, to confuse them is perilous; to equate them, tragic.

[The following is editorial in nature and not an official statement of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey]

Early on Tuesday I cast my vote for US President, US Senator, US Congressperson, and several local offices. Am I certain that my votes were cast wisely and with sound knowledge of the facts, positions, and policies involved? No. In reality, I have no assurance given the claims, accusations, promises, and records of those seeking public office. I did listen, watch and read a great deal -- at times feeling well informed and confident, other times feeling overwhelmed and confused -- and, in the end, made a choice by marking my ballot with care and precision based on whom I liked best. The facts were not satisfyingly helpful. Identical and contradictory facts were expertly woven into opposite conclusions depending on who it is that lays claim to these “truths.” I recall the scene of Our Lord standing before Pilate as he asked Him, “What is truth?” Such is the nature of the political world and its corresponding power and authority.

I find it helpful to engage in a little mind exercise on this point. It seems to me that within the Lord’s chosen twelve there was room for both Matthew the tax collector (for creative fun, let’s call him a pro-government liberal Democrat) and Simon the Zealot (let’s call him a anti-government conservative Republican). They probably had some heated political discussion and debate sitting around the campfire on chilly evenings. Yet I don’t recall any detailed accounting of this in the Gospels, nor commentary on which of them was “right” or “wrong.” No, it seems that the “truth” uniting them was the essence of “that which is truly needful.” This “truth” was not to be found in discussion, debate, or politics, but in the very person of the Christ. They seem to have known the difference between these realities. Matthew and Simon apparently knew that the kingdom of this world is not to be confused or co-mingled with the Kingdom where power and authority are defined by servant-hood and sacrifice: by mercy, humility, forgiveness, love...where “God is the Lord Who has revealed Himself to us.”

I ponder this as I prepare for the 17th All-American Council and the election that will occur there. How do I sort out the worldly politicization of things from the discernment I pray for through the grace of the Holy Spirit? It is not easy. Matthew and Simon can be heard arguing in the background, and apparently they have enlisted their friends to enter the fray.

Let’s see. There’s a plethora of voices flooding cyberspace with this, that, and whatever. It seems that if anything can be said, someone has said it; if it can be asserted, someone has asserted it; if it can be called “the truth,” someone has called it “the truth;” if it could be imagined, someone has imagined it. It makes for great reading provided one is seeking intrigues, innuendoes, insolence and insistence. In the midst of a legion of voices and those who begin the discussion seeking a fight, here I stand...wondering precisely where the noise and confrontation comes

from and where it seeks to take us. What is the motivation? What is the goal? Is there an agenda? Is all of this, or any part of it in particular, worthy of a blessing? Does it build up, or shake up, or tear down? Trying to discern motives is, at least for me, a requisite to interpreting the various “truths” and spins thereof. While it is not for me to judge the motivations or intentions of others, most of whom I do not even know, declining a rush to judgment does not rule out observation and evaluation. So, as I muddle my way through the vast morass of things being said and promulgated, I pause to ask: Does it sound like the Beatitudes or like sleazy billowing? Does it fill the church with a sweet-smelling fragrance, or with acrimoniously stale scents? Are peace and unity the goal, or conflict and strife? Where, in all of this, is the “Truth” that alone can set us free?

Beginning today, I will turn-off and tune-out. I have read and heard enough to attain a sufficient level of confusion and puzzlement. I already “know” too much, question too much, and suspect things to be true that I am convinced are untrue! I am fatigued and tired of it; I am ashamed to witness “the life of the world” played out like a petty political game. It brings me to tears.

I stand in judgment of myself. I need to confess and repent of my willingness to enjoy the machinations of gossip, sarcasm, and maliciousness. Instead, I will spend the recovered time and energy in prayerful preparation for the All-American Council. I will strive to force myself to “seek first the Kingdom of God” rather than another kingdom; to follow the Beatitudes rather than the blogs; to build-up rather than break-down; to love; to be merciful.

Prayers in preparation for the 17th All-American Council are to be found [HERE](#).

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