

My friends in Christ, today...we are going to reflect upon politics. Yes. *Politics*.... Are you all awake *now*?

We are going to reflect upon politics because apparently *everything* is political now. It seems that every other billboard is political. Signs with names printed on them of various people running for public office *used* to be contained to the late-summer and early-fall...but *now*, those signs are up and all *over* the place...*all...year...long...and every...single...year!* Every color of the light spectrum is some sort of political statement. Every single menu item at every single restaurant seems to spark political controversy anymore. “Oh, you eat *meat*? You must have voted for Trump! Harumph!”

It *used* to be that everything was not *political*; it was *sexual*. A car advertisement on television would feature a young woman, barely clothed, speaking in a breathless whisper...and *maybe* a car or a truck would be featured by the end of the commercial. And we, the viewers, are left to wonder if we are going to get ourselves some sex if we buy that car! Football commercials would show more of the mostly-naked cheerleaders than actual football. And every single Hollywood film released in theaters was basically *required* to have a sex scene in it, no matter how awkward and out of place!

But *not* anymore. Because *now*, sex is *out*...and *politics* is in.

Consider the ongoing, ever-going, never-ending debates over masks and vaccines. It seems that if you choose *not* to get the vaccine, then you are worse than Hitler, and your free choice about what you want to do with your own body *basically* makes you a domestic terrorist.... And as for the masks, well...do you not know that masks are how the powers-that-be are going to oppress us and control us, taking away our freedoms, taking away our rights, taking away our *lives*?

Consider Afghanistan. I see almost *nothing* in the news about the plight of those poor folks who have been left behind! Instead, I see a *lot* of silly mud-slinging. “This is *Biden’s* fault! No, this is *Trump’s* fault!” Hey! What about those poor folks who got left behind, huh? I saw a fairly good movie called *Gangs of New York*. I will never forget this one certain scene. Apparently, the politics of 19th-Century New York City was *so* bad, so *wretched*, that even fire-fighting districts were at each other’s throats! The fire chief of *this* district was yelling at the fire chief of *that* district – bickering

and arguing about which district is responsible for putting out the fire; meanwhile, the house was burning down and the family was barely able to get out!

Okay, so what do *politics* have to do with the *Gospel*. Well, I guess *that* is precisely the point: politics have *nothing* to do with Gospel! And Jesus says as much (yes, with a *subtle* grace and in *little* ways, but He says it all the same). “Give to Caesar what *belongs* to Caesar and to *God* what belongs to God.” That is perhaps the most *obvious* example. And He says it in little ways even here in our Gospel text today: He calls the Pharisees “hypocrites.” Now...how can *that*...be *political*?

The *immediate* context of this Gospel text has to do with the shallow, surface observance of the Mosaic Law...but in absence of any authentic *faith* in God. “This people honors Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me.” And the *broader* context of this Gospel passage in Scripture, within the liturgical setting of the Church and her weekday Liturgy of the Word, presents the Lord as calling them out as hypocrites this entire past week! “Woe to you” and “woe to you” again! All week long – those *hypocrites*!

But there is an even broader context *still* that reveals the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. It was the age of the Roman Empire, remember. The Sadducees, on *their* part, decided to go the route of placating the Roman overlords – going along to get along. But I might argue that the hypocrisy of the *Pharisees* with regard to the Roman overlords, though more *subtle*, was *just as horrendous*. That is revealed in the historical fact that the Pharisees wanted Jesus dead, too. And though they *said* that they hate the Roman overlords...well, they sure seemed to be perfectly fine with going along with them in order to get along...as long as it meant that the Romans would kill Jesus.

Their *politics*, you see, got in the way of their *faith*. And the *world* became *far* more important than the *Kingdom*. And the comfortable *livelihood* to which they were accustomed was a much *greater* treasure for them than was *life eternal*...the pearl of great price.

Now...does *that* sound familiar? I sure *hope* so. Because I suspect that *every*...*single*...*one* of us here is convicted of having allowed *ourselves* to let *our* politics supplant *our* faith...and *our* world has become far more important even than the Kingdom of God. And *our* comfortable livelihoods,

our routines (our *ruts*, rather!), *our* way of doing things (*my* way or the *highway*, Father Lewis!) is *now* more greatly treasured than everlasting life in halls of heavenly realms.

So...how do we fix this? How do we right this wrong?

Step one: stop worrying about politics! Because politics is *not* everything – just as *sex* is not everything, either! Politics is *not* life! Jesus did *not* come to establish utopia on Earth; in fact, as He Himself says, “I have come to set the earth *on fire!*” He came to establish *not a utopia* but rather the in-breaking of the Kingdom; “Behold, the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!” And Christ will come again in glory to establish a *new* Heaven, a *new* Earth!

Jesus is not a communist; He is not a capitalist either. He is *God!* And He is *not* some glad-handing politician or virtue-signaling Hollywood celebrity spouting silly political opinions. He is a *warrior!* He is our *champion!* And He was sent on a *rescue* mission – *the* rescue mission – so as to *save* us from this fallen, broken world – a world of vice and sin but nevertheless a world to which all of us sure do seem to grasp and cling as if our very *lives* depended *only* on *this* world and on no other!

Jesus came to rescue us from *this*; and in the Eucharist, He comes again and again and *again* in order to supply us with His grace – His very *life* – that we might have the strength to *let go* of this stupid world, thus to grasp and cling desperately to *Him* instead! Because the world...is imploding, collapsing in on itself. Yes, *again!* Just as it has *always* done. (And frankly, we need to be far better students of history, because the fact of the matter is that the world embracing its own *self-implosion* has happened *before*, and in fact *many* times...and it *will* happen *again!* This is nothing new, folks!)

The world just *does* this; it is what the world *does*. But when we freak out because of it, then we, *too*, are the hypocrites because we act like sin and death and Satan himself have not *already* been defeated and that we are not *already* living in the *Kingdom*. Because “*our* citizenship is in *Heaven*,” *not* on *Earth*...*not* in the United States...*not* in the state of Washington...and *not* in the city of Spokane Valley...but in *Heaven*. But why do we *forget* that simple and beautiful truth? Why do we lose sight of this every single time we hear a siren or see some smoke or turn on the news?

For the Kingdom of Heaven is where *God* has full rein, *not* Biden or Trump...where *Jesus* is King, *not* Inslee...where the *Holy Spirit* has dominion, *not* your celebrity *de jour*. And even *more*: it is

our faith (simple, beautiful truth) that the domain of God...is the human heart. We have God with us *always* – Emmanuel! God, Who is our Father Who art in Heaven...and Jesus Christ, Who is our Brother and Friend...and the Holy Spirit, Who is the Giver of Life, our Advocate and Guide. And we are beloved children of our loving Father...and chosen brethren and friends of the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ...and glorious temples of the Holy Spirit.... But why do we *forget* that? Why do we act and behave, talk and live, as if *none* of that were *true*?

So, step one: stop worrying about politics. Step two: remember our calling. The universal call to holiness is the all-caps VOCATION of each and every single one of us. And the crux of the universal call to holiness is to cooperate with God's grace given to us in the Sacraments to continue striving for and working toward the in-breaking of the Kingdom of Heaven in human hearts and to do so for every single person – the world *entire*! Because it seems that petty politics sure has done a fine job of making this fallen, broken world a far *more* dark and dreary place...and it is our mission, therefore...*if* disciples of Jesus Christ we would truly be...to carry the Light of Christ – that divine torch of a golden and glorious fire – right into the *heart* of darkness...and to do so with *truth*...and in *love*...with confidence and conviction...with patience and charity.

And step three – and this is the most practical step (but *also* the most *difficult*): turn off your social media – *forever*! Turn off the news – *forever*! Get rid of your Apple TV and your Disney+ and your Netflix – *forever*! Stop listening to talk radio – *forever*! If you listen to talk radio every *day*...well, I wonder when was the last time you went to confession.... Probably most of you go to Mass every *week*...but I wonder how much television you watch every *day*.... All of us have the lyrics of “Sweet Caroline” sufficiently memorized – at least the refrain and the “duh-duh-duh” parts of it...but how many of us have *any* part of the *Bible* memorized?

What are we allowing to enter into our minds and hearts? If our personality, our character, is the average of the five people with whom we spend most of our time...are those five people the politicians and the talking-heads and the celebrities *de jour*...or are those five people the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, together with Mother Mary and our Guardian Angel? What are we giving permission to enter into our minds and hearts? To whom are we giving tacit permission to control

us, influence us, change us into who *they* want us to be? Because the *world*? The world wants us to be mindless robots. But *God*? God wants us to be beloved children, and brethren, and temples of heavenly glory.

So, step three: “do not conform yourselves to *this* [world]...but be transformed [for life in the world to come] by the renewal of your minds” and hearts, so “that you may discern what is the will of God...what is good and pleasing and perfect.” Or as we heard from Saint James today, “to keep [yourself] unstained by the world.”

My friends in Christ...we have reflected upon politics (*Gasp!* How *dare* he!)...but *really*, we reflected upon the Kingdom of Heaven, and the glorious majesty of God, and the Champion Who is Jesus Christ, and the dominion of the Holy Spirit...the salvation of souls...and our mission, our universal call to holiness, that strives for and works toward this.... And so...may it be that we will give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.... May it be that we will not permit ourselves to be hypocrites any longer.... May it be that, even though we can and must have grave concern for *this* world (insofar as we can and must have grave concern for the *souls* of those who, for now, are trapped having to *live* in this world)...even so, we will be mindful always and everywhere that *this* world is *not* our home...but that our true and lasting home...that place where life eternal awaits...is nothing less than Heaven itself.

Blessed be God...praised be Jesus Christ...come Holy Spirit...now and forever. Amen.