

**Sermon for Morning Prayer
The Festival of Christ the King
(The last Sunday in October)**

Collect:

ALL MIGHTY and everlasting God, who dost will that all things be subject to the dominion of thy beloved Son, and that he may be owned as King over all: We pray thee to heal the nations, wounded and divided by their sins, and knit them together in blessed obedience to the King of kings and Lord of lords, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. *Amen.*

Lessons:

First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-third Verse of the thirty-fourth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel.

“. . . And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the LORD have spoken it. And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods. And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing. And the tree of the field shall yield her fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase, and they shall be safe in their land, and shall know that I am the LORD, when I have broken the bands of their yoke, and delivered them out of the hand of those that served themselves of them. And they shall no more be a prey to the heathen, neither shall the beast of the land devour them; but they shall dwell safely, and none shall make them afraid. And I will raise up for them a plant of renown, and they shall be no more consumed with hunger in the land, neither bear the shame of the heathen any more. Thus shall they know that I the LORD their God am with them, and that they, even the house of Israel, are my people, saith the Lord GOD. And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord GOD.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fifteenth Verse of the eleventh Chapter of the Revelation of St. John the Divine.

“. . . And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the First Lesson: “Thus shall they know that I the LORD their God am with them, and that they, even the house of Israel, are my people, saith the Lord GOD. And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord GOD.” In the Name of the Father, and of the † Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Introduction:

On the ACC’s *Ordo Kalendar*, today is the “Black Letter” Day or optional observance of “The Feast of Christ the King”. However, in the Church of India, Pakistan, Burma, and Ceylon, which forms the ACC’s Second Province, this is a “Red Letter Day” or, as our Roman brethren would term it, a holy day of obligation.

This celebration in honor of the kingship of Our Lord grew up in the late 19th Century as an unofficial devotion in many parishes and congregations in the Roman Catholic Church. In 1925, Pope Pius XI declared it to be a permanent part of the Roman Kalendar and fixed its date as the last Sunday in October each year.

Throughout the 20th Century, this Feast was increasingly adopted by Anglicans, Lutherans, and others who recognized its essential appropriateness because we all call upon Christ as our King and Saviour. This became an official part of the Kalendar adopted in 1963 as part of the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of India. Not only is that Prayer Book the last trustworthy traditional edition but it is

one of the Books authorized by the Constitution of this Church, so this Feast is now an official alternative observance among all of us Anglican Catholics.

It is also the Feast of Title of many parishes in a number of jurisdictions and communions as well, of course, of our sister jurisdiction, the Anglican Province of Christ the King.

Oddly, after the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Church moved its observance to the last Sunday in the liturgical year, that is, between November 20 and November 26. Being Anglicans, however, we do not like to change anything and, in any case, we reject most of the innovations introduced by that Council. Thus we retain the original date and celebrate this Feast on the last Sunday in October each year.

Theme:

In the United States, this observance always falls a week or so before our most common day for general elections. Thus, as we contemplate the Kingship of Christ and our rôle as His subjects, it is appropriate also to consider our duties as citizens of the political jurisdictions in which we reside. We must always “live out” that secular citizenship from the perspective of our heavenly one:

“[O]ur citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will conform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”

So, as we near our annual election season, it is appropriate for us to consider what we, as aspiring citizens of the Kingdom that is God’s, should do as voters of the republic in which we live here on earth.

Development:

All Christians should find springing readily to mind Christ’s classic apothegm on the relationship of the Church to the State: “Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s.” If that is not enough to convince you that the Christian is called to play a specific part as citizen of the secular state, then consider these other Scriptural injunctions:

“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.... For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil.... For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to *execute* wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore *ye* must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.”

So, too: “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing *ye* may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using *your* liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all *men*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.”

In other words, the secular state has its own part to play in fulfilling God’s plan for His people. As it is the state that provides the civil peace that is essential to the conduct of orderly religious, social, and personal lives, so Christians are directed to submit themselves to all legitimate governments. The obvious implication of this, however, is that Christians are not only to coöperate with the operations of those governments, but to participate in them as well. One important reason for this is to infuse, so far as possible, the *ethos* and culture of those governments with Christian principles and understandings. That reduces to some degree the ever-present risk that any particular government will create an irreconcilable conflict between the nature of its actions and what Christian consciences can tolerate.

In this approaching electoral season, we can expect to be told over and over that the state of the national economy is the most important current issue. I put it to you, however, that one has not fulfilled his Christian duty if he makes his electoral choices on the basis of what he thinks is best for his own selfish financial status. Rather, as a conscientious citizen, one must take into account larger issues of Christian doctrine and belief and how those issues are woven into the present political context.

Therefore I submit that it is appropriate that we examine how devout Christians should seek out the teachings of the Christian Faith, and especially the teachings set forth in the Christian Scriptures, and then bring these teachings to bear upon the most important propositions that form the current political landscape. Just two

examples should be sufficient to illustrate this process. These examples do not involve easy questions, or questions that are either comfortable or pleasant to contemplate. They are, however, essential questions, questions that invoke fundamental Christian doctrines, questions we cannot evade if we are to maintain our integrity as people of principle.

Abortion.

In the present state of our society, there are a number of issues that Christians who take seriously their duties as secular citizens will wish to consider conscientiously as they decide how to cast their ballots. One of the most important of these issues is, of course, that of abortion.

There are numerous aspects to this debate but here and now I would like to place just two questions before you, questions that are virtually always ignored in the political presentations on this issue, questions that, it seems to me, no serious Christian can avoid carefully considering and resolving for himself or for herself.

The first of these questions arises because, as Christians, we believe that each living human being possesses a unique, divinely-given, and immortal soul. The abortionists suggest that the embryo is not a fully human person which necessarily implies that this soul is not present in the embryo from the time of its conception, that is, from the time biological life commences. The question for the Christian, therefore, must be, "At what point in that embryo's development is that soul installed in it and how does that soul arrive in it after the fact, so to speak?"

In answering that question for himself or for herself, each Christian must inevitably take into consideration the teaching that is set forth in Genesis regarding the ensoulment of each living person: "God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him...."

The second of these questions is this: "If we as Christians believe that the embryo *in utero* is a human person, possessed of a unique, divinely-given soul, is it possible for us to tolerate the extinction of its life for mere reasons of convenience, or of financial comfort, or to avoid social embarrassment?" In answering that question, each Christian must inevitably take into consideration the Commandment set forth

in the Pentateuch: “You shall not murder.” Nor can this be considered a purely private, personal issue, for murder is always a matter of the security of the entire social order. The experience of Nazi Germany teaches us that if today one group can be defined as being outside the universal prohibition on murder, then tomorrow any other group may similarly be deprived of this most basic of social and legal protections.

Marriage.

Another of the important current political issues is that of marriage. The news media and the chattering classes strongly favor the redefinition of marriage so as to make it include not just the unions of one man with one woman – which the vast majority of human societies have always seen as the proper sphere of marriage – but also new combinations and pairings of almost infinite variety.

This intended expansion of the marriage concept is at the moment presented primarily in the context of one man’s relationship to one other man or one woman’s relationship to one other woman but we may be sure, not least from the publications of the changes’ advocates themselves, that if these redefinitions are institutionalized, further redefinitions will be right behind them.

In assessing the different candidates’ positions on this issue, each Christian must consider a number of Scriptural injunctions. One from Genesis claims that the differentiation of humanity into two sexes is a fundamental part of God’s plan for creation: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”

It is because of this divinely-ordained fundamental component of human nature that marriage is ordained in the first place. Thus the Gospel teaches us: “[H]e which made *them* at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh[.] Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh.”

It is also because of this divinely-ordained fundamental aspect of human nature that we are told in both the Old Testament and the New that homosexual behavior – as distinct from homosexual inclinations or temptations – is an abomination, cannot be tolerated in a godly society, and is a sin of such serious proportions that it bars the

doors of heaven to those who first commit it and who thereafter fail to repent and make amends for it.

One of the related issues now before our political society is whether the individual states can protect traditional male-female marriage from such redefinitions. A further corollary of that is whether even those states where a majority of the citizens support such traditional concepts may nevertheless be compelled to accept non-conforming so-called “marriages” that have been sanctioned by other, more revisionist states.

In connection with this, it is now a real probability that if the revisionists have their way, so-called “hate crimes” or “hate speech” legislation and regulations will be applied by plaintiffs in civil courts and by so-called “civil rights” agencies to ban people of faith from preaching, teaching, or discussing in public their religious convictions regarding the nature of marriage and permissible sexual activities.

This has already happened in the United Kingdom and has been threatened in Canada, in either of which this sermon may constitute an actionable offense. This statutory suppression of free speech is being considered in, of course, California. Thus it is not only Christians’ concept of marriage that is at risk; their freedom to pass their moral convictions on to their own children is also under grave threat.

Conclusion:

Because every Christian is simultaneously a subject of Christ the King, a citizen of the Kingdom of God, and a citizen of a secular state, no Christian can properly refuse to participate in the orderly political process. Christians are commanded to go out and proselytize the world and the voter’s ballot box is often more important to that process than even the orator’s soap box.

There would be little point in inviting friends, neighbors, or co-workers to come to church if that same church were muzzled and forbidden to expose those visitors to its most basic teachings about the nature of creation, the nature of mankind, and the proper conduct of people in society.

Quietism – the withdrawal from participation in society on grounds that are ostensibly religious – is not the act of a person of faith, it is the act of a coward. It is no excuse for non-participation that it is often difficult to know what the right

choice may be or that the issues are hard to understand and require study and application. At issue is, quite simply, the nature of the society in which we are to live and practice our religion and in which we will bring up our children and grandchildren.

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The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister
October 25, 2009.

1 The Kalendar, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xi (CIPBC 1963).

2 Ibid. 623.

3 Lessons Proper for Holy Days not included in the Foregoing Table, op. cit. xlii.

4 Ezekiel 34:23-31 (KJV).

5 Revelation 11:15-17 (KJV).

6 Ezekiel 34:30-31 (KJV).

7 NIV.

8 St. Matthew 22:21b (KJV); cf. St. Luke 20:25.

9 Romans 13:1-7 (KJV).

10 1 Peter 2:13-17 (KJV).

11 Genesis 1:26a & 27a (KJV).

12 Exodus 20:13 (NIV); Deuteronomy 5:17 (NIV).

13 Genesis 1:27 (KJV).

14 St. Matthew 19:4b-6 (KJV).

15 Leviticus 18:22-23.

16 Leviticus 20:13.

17 Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9.

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