

“Beloved: first of all, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions and thanksgivings be offered for . . . kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity” I want to preach on that second reading from I Timothy. Most of you are aware of the current situation – the political violence, assassinations, wars, polarization, the breakdown of cultural norms.

Today I’m not going to tell you what to do politically. Anything I suggested would just lead half of you to shut your ears. And I don’t have a solution to our crisis. Politics is largely the laity’s realm, in any case, but I would at least like to address some of our reactions to them in the context of our Faith.

First, as Disciples of Christ, I hope we start by praying and fasting for the country. People can mock calls for prayer and fasting, but in times like these they are a Disciple’s best weapons. It feels like things are slipping away and we’re losing control. But we are always overestimating our control of the world. God is in control. And that

means seeking His intervention and mercy through prayer and fasting is the most effective response we can make. Again, “Beloved: I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions . . . be offered . . . for kings and for all in authority.” That was St. Paul praying for the Roman Emperor Nero! So, pray, say, a rosary a day – or fast a day each month -- for the country and all public figures, not just the ones on our “side.”

Second, let us not demonize people. What do I mean? The danger today is that we’re dividing into different cultures – tribes – not just parties. Liberal Democracy is a very strong form of government IF citizens agree on the fundamental philosophy of a society. Democracy requires that the losers of an election trust the winners not to hurt them, that waiting for the next election is better than taking to the streets to fight for power. Does the other side consist of people we can surrender to? Or, once in power will they hurt us and outlaw our way of life? If the citizens of a democracy are divided not just by policy programs, but opposing cultures, there is too much at stake for the

system to handle. The courtesies, conventions, and compromises that grease the working of democracy disappear – and fighting over the letter of the law takes over – and eventually even the law won't stop a fundamental division over first principles. The slave states refusal to accept Lincoln's election in 1860 is the classic American example of this breakdown. That didn't end well.

Such divisions evolve in four stages. First, we start by thinking of the others as mistaken. They've made a bad evaluation of the facts and come to a mistaken conclusion. Next stage: my opponents are, not just mistaken, but wrong. It's not just a matter of mistaken judgment. Their basic ideology, philosophy, religion, how they view the world is wrong. It doesn't match reality. Now these first two stages are part of ordinary political and cultural life.

But if the divisions become deep enough, I begin to see my adversaries as not merely wrong, but dangerous. They are so wrong that they are a threat to me and society's very well-being and even

survival. And, so, from being mistaken, to being wrong, to being dangerous, my enemy at last is seen as evil. And, of course, we must defend ourselves against evil by any means necessary, right? The next step is political violence. This is happening now. As Disciples let us admit that there are dangerous, even evil – ideas. But never let us drift into thinking the people holding them are evil. We must not lose sight that the other side are children of God.

Finally, amidst the chaos, let us Disciples never forget our relationship to the political world as Catholic Christians. St. Paul prayed for political figures who would persecute and eventually kill him. But in praying for Caesar, Paul never forgot that Jesus is Lord. He was willing to die for that truth.

Many Americans have seen the United States as more than just another nation. We see ourselves as a nation with a mission to bring democracy, freedom, and peace to the world. But whatever the genuine good, blessings, and accomplishments that America has

brought to the world – and they are many -- we must remember that all of it is separate from Christian faith and the salvation of humanity. I love my country, but God is God and Caesar is Caesar, and our first allegiance is to God. The collapse, confusion, and chaos that would occur if America spiraled downward into something other than a liberal democracy would be disastrous for the world's peace and stability. But America is not the hope of the world.

Only Jesus Christ is the hope of the world. He has already won the victory – and we are members of His Victorious and Risen Body no matter what happens in the temporal world. And, so, we must always give witness to Him no matter what is happening around us – or how hard the world tries to silence us.

Note: that should not be understood to mean that I don't think we should participate in politics as Catholics. By all means vote, use your formed, Catholic conscience to fight for the common good.

I'm only saying, we don't choose the times we live in. But we are called to be faithful in them. We have been given the challenge to retain and even increase the Catholic Faith in a darkening age. Our task may be simply to persevere -- to remain faithful when others around us flee or forget Jesus. Obviously, Christ our King believes we are capable of it, or we wouldn't be alive here and now. Let us, then, look toward this future in that hope, working for the common good of America and to overcome this crisis. But also resolve to be worthy of the confidence of Jesus, our true King, and trust His grace to see us through whatever comes.