

[Readings: Daniel 7:13-14; Ps. 93; Rev. 1:5-8; John 18:33b-37]

Timothy P. O'Malley, Ph.D., the director of education at the McGrath Institute for Church Life at the University of Notre Dame, offers this reflection on the proper role of politics in the Church. He says this:

You often hear people say that politics have no place in the Church. Many Americans are leaving Christianity because they see it as being mixed up with the political. They grow more suspicious of a Church that gets involved in elections. In some ways, these disaffiliated persons are correct. The Church ceases to practice the Politics of the Kingdom of God when full support is given to a specific candidate or when the ministers of the Church implicitly support a politician because of the D or R or I that follows their name.

But they're also wrong to think that our Church has nothing to do with politics. Even Mahatma Gandhi called politics without principles one of the Seven Deadly Sins of the Modern World. The other Deadly Sins are wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, science without humanity, knowledge without character, commerce without morality and worship without sacrifice.

The Church is intrinsically political, as we hear in today's Gospel. Jesus encounters Pilate. Pilate is the bad politician par excellence. He knows how to curry favor with the right people at the right time. And he's climbing. He does not want to remain the procurator of backwater Jerusalem.

And yet, there's Jesus. This Jewish man, who has been brought forward to be executed by Roman authorities.

Pilate asks: "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus responds, "You say I am a king. For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice" (Jn 18:37).

This is the Kingship of Jesus. This is the politics of the Kingdom of God. Jesus is the King Who speaks truth into a world committed to lies. He proclaims light in the darkness. The Church is properly political when the Church follows her Lord in [speaking the truth](#).

Might isn't right. [Power is made perfect in weakness](#). Every life is sacred. This is the truth. And those who pursue the truth will listen to the voice of the King, Whose throne is the Cross. The Church must restrict herself to the politics of the Kingdom of God.

Pontius Pilate walks back and forth between his private quarters and the public courtyard no fewer than seven times. He cannot make up his mind. He is indecisive about what to do with Jesus.

Pilate the interrogator asks no fewer than 10 questions in John's Gospel, all aimed at establishing the true identity of the condemned man in front of him. Pilate's burning issue is encapsulated in the first question he addresses to Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?" It's a question about power, about authority. The crowd that brought Jesus into Pilate's presence claims this man has done things he has no right to do. Pilate wants to know what rights Jesus is claiming for himself. Governments are always interested in matters of rights and authority, because naturally they are in the power game themselves.

We have to admit that Jesus does look pathetically weak in this scene, standing with a bloodied and torn robe over His shoulders, and wearing a crown of sharp and unforgiving thorns on His head. Not much of a super-power here.

But looks can be deceiving.

There is so much more anxiety in our world it seems, than ever before. Our culture seems to be heading into a downward spiral of immorality and hatred. War and conflict have gone from identifiable enemies and battlefields to suicide bombers and random terrorist targets. It was very easy to identify our enemies; now they are homegrown anonymously and unassumingly in our very neighborhoods. Violence and murder in our schools are at an all-time high, and even road rage can turn into a homicide.

Where is all of this taking us? What is our Christian response to terrorism and bullying and random violence?

I'll bet you feel a lot like Jesus in today's Gospel; standing before the powers that be, powerless. Today's feast is not about despair and defeat; it's about hope and ultimate victory. Satan may seem to be winning battle after

battle, but Jesus Christ is not only going to be the Ultimate Victor, He already won two thousand years ago. You and I only need to plug into that victory.

During times of great stress and turmoil in the life of Jesus and in our own lives as well, we can experience the greatest sense of the closeness of God.

When the need is the greatest, when we really have to have this spiritual help, God will certainly and eventually extend it to us.

If someone who knew nothing of Christ's Kingdom were to ask you what the Kingdom is, how would you describe your "vision" of it?

God's love is liberating. Where have you felt God's freeing love?

To what do you give your ultimate allegiance -- the Kingdom of God, or the kingdoms of the world?

When we confuse worldly power or prestige with the Cross, we become more like Pilate than Jesus Christ. We become less interested in pursuing truth than the will to power. On this solemnity, let us, as members of the Church, become even more political. But let our politics be founded in the Cross of Our Lord. A politics of love and communion made possible through the self-giving love of the Word made flesh.

Christians -- you and I -- are called to listen to the voice of Jesus and learn where we are going; otherwise we're sure to end up someplace else. As we anticipate Thanksgiving this Thursday, let us truly give thanks to God our help in ages past, and to turn to Him first and always when we need help. Then, as faithful servants of the Kingdom of God, we can use the gifts of God's great Holy Spirit of grace and wisdom with our own sweat equity to renew the face of the earth. We may be carriers of the Kingdom, but thank God we're not the architects. AMEN!