

National Day of Election 4 + November + 2008

“O Lord, for what and for whom shall we pray?”

Romans 8:26

Reading

Romans 13:1–7

Submission to the Authorities

¹Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ²Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, ⁴for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer.

⁵Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience. ⁶For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. ⁷Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

Psalm

Psalm 33

The Steadfast Love of the LORD

¹Shout for joy in the LORD, O you righteous!

Praise befits the upright.

²Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre;
make melody to him with the harp of ten strings!

³Sing to him a new song;
play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.

⁴For the word of the LORD is upright,
and all his work is done in faithfulness.

⁵He loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD.

⁶By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
and by the breath of his mouth all their host.

⁷He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap;
he puts the deeps in storehouses.

⁸Let all the earth fear the LORD;
let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!

⁹For he spoke, and it came to be;
he commanded, and it stood firm.

¹⁰The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing;
he frustrates the plans of the peoples.

¹¹The counsel of the LORD stands forever,
the plans of his heart to all generations.

¹²Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,
the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!

¹³The LORD looks down from heaven;
he sees all the children of man;

¹⁴from where he sits enthroned he looks out
on all the inhabitants of the earth,

¹⁵he who fashions the hearts of them all
and observes all their deeds.

¹⁶The king is not saved by his great army;
a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.

¹⁷The war horse is a false hope for salvation,
and by its great might it cannot rescue.

¹⁸Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him,
on those who hope in his steadfast love,
¹⁹that he may deliver their soul from death
and keep them alive in famine.

²⁰Our soul waits for the LORD;
he is our help and our shield.
²¹For our heart is glad in him,
because we trust in his holy name.
²²Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us,
even as we hope in you.

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

Reading

John 18:33–38a

My Kingdom Is Not of This World

³³So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” ³⁴Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?” ³⁵Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?” ³⁶Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.” ³⁷Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” ³⁸Pilate said to him, “What is truth?”

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. 27 And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:26-28)

Opinions and passions have run deep this election season, and we Christians are not immune to these. Nor should we be. God's people know full well that we live IN this world and yet we are not OF this world. This provides an interesting tension in which we find ourselves. We live in two kingdoms, reigns, or governances. There is the left hand kingdom, which is comprised of the kingdoms of this world. It is the realm of rulers and governments, laws and statutes, judges and all kinds of officials. The left hand kingdom finds its source in the Fourth Commandment, the First Article of the Apostles' Creed, and the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer. The Lord Jesus articulates this clearly and succinctly when asked about paying taxes. To the Pharisees and the Herodians trying to entrap Him, Jesus said:

“Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.” (Matthew 22:21)

The things that are God's belong to the right hand kingdom, to the kingdom of Christ, where forgiveness and grace reigns, where the forgiving gifts of God of baptism, absolution, the Lord's Supper, establish and feed and forgive the citizens of this other kingdom, the kingdom, which Jesus instructs Pontius Pilate, “is not of this world” (John 18:36)

Except for a portion of the Old Testament history of Israel when the Lord Almighty was honored as Israel's only king, there has been no viable theocracy. Even then, there were needed earthly faces and people, placed by God and given authority by Him, to rule over and judge His people. Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Deborah, Samson, Samuel were some of those rulers, followed by King Saul, King David, King Solomon, and then the divided kingdoms and their mixed bag of faithful and unfaithful kings. In their unfaithfulness and unrepentance, the Lord chastised His people with rulers of other nations: Cyrus and Nebuchadnezzar are such rulers. It is always God's hope that such earthly rulers would recognize their true source of power and authority, namely, that such comes from Him and Him alone, and that such rulers would abide according to those things which benefit all of human kind.

But when this is not the case, it is still important of Christians, God's people, to be involved in the messy world of governments, politics, city councils, hospital boards, state and national legislatures, and so on. We see this also in God's Word, for we see how gracious God was not only to His own people but to many, many peoples by raising up leaders like Joseph, who was second only to Pharaoh in all of Egypt, and like Daniel, and Shadrach and Meshach and Abednego, who, though lied against and persecuted and fed to lions and fiery furnaces, lived in the incredible tension between a kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God. St. Paul, in His letter to the Christians in Philippi, concludes his epistle with these words:

All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.
(Philippians 4:22)

And so we thank God that His people are found throughout all of society, acting as leaven, salt and light, quietly and sometimes publically influencing the decisions of this world.

But for what and for whom should we pray this day? Is it proper to pray for the election of certain candidates?

We receive our cue from the Lord Jesus Himself, who, as Potentate of the entire universe, descended from heaven and humbled Himself under the left hand rulers of this earth's kingdoms. There was Caesar Augustus, under whose reign Jesus was born. There was Herod the Great, who, in jealousy and fear, sought the death of the infant or toddler Jesus. There was Pontius Pilate, under whose earthly decision the very life of the Lord Jesus was placed. But we also need to remind ourselves today—and we pray that our earthly rulers remember this every morning when they arise—they have no earthly authority or power without the consent of God. The Lord Jesus, King Jesus, instructs and reminds Pontius Pilate of this very thing. St. John records the conversation in chapter 19:

10 So Pilate said to [Jesus], “You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?” 11 Jesus answered him, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.”

12 From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, “If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.” (John 19:10-12)

St. Paul himself, who lived under the reign of Roman emperors and exercised his Roman right as a citizen to appeal to Caesar, that is, the emperor Nero, writes to Timothy:

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. (1 Timothy 2:1-2, ESV)

The Fourth Commandment bids God's people to not only to "honor our father and mother that it may be well with thee and thou mayest live long on the earth", but, as Martin Luther instructs us:

We should fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents or other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them.

That sounds like a big challenge, perhaps not so much honoring, serving, obeying, loving and cherishing parents, but other authorities. How often do we think about our Christian duty and responsibility to show our elected officials, whether we voted for them or not, honor, service, obedience, love and esteem, that is, to cherish them. That task alone should drive us to some serious and deep prayer.

It is also under the First Article of the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth" that we recognize that one of the ways God supports our body and life and the way He defends us against all danger and guards and protects us from all evil is through our earthly rulers. They are the "mask of God" in this place. They are charged with the high calling of providing for many, making the wisest of decisions which protect and provide for in honest and upright ways the people of this land. Again, we learn just from that alone that our elected officials seriously and continuously need our prayers and private and public encouragement.

But it is within the Lord's Prayer itself that we find our truest reason for praying for those who have been elected to positions in the left hand kingdom. Under the Fourth Petition, "Give us this day our daily bread" Martin Luther instructs us in the very meaning of "daily bread." "Daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, **devout and faithful rulers, good government**, good

weather, **peace**, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.”

How often do we think of our elected officials when we pray the words, “Give us this day our daily bread”? They are part of God’s answer to our prayer.

And, so as we pray this day for our present leaders and those who are being elected this day, we pray especially according to the Second Table of the Ten Commandments,

That, according to the Fourth Commandment, *Honor your father and mother*, that our elected officials with humility realize that they have positions of incredible responsibility to the rest of us as they oversee and direct many aspects of our collective lives; that they preserve the structure of the most elemental foundation of all of civilization, that is a household with a mother and a father, and that we give them the honor God bids us to give them;

That, according to the Fifth Commandment, *You shall not kill*, that our elected officials wield wisely and carefully the sword of punishment which has been entrusted to them, preserving life when possible, but also defending the innocent from great harm, evil and acts of violence, and that they care for all human beings, the unborn, the mentally and physically disabled, and the aged, that they be treated with dignity according to the precious gift of life which is theirs and only God’s to take;

That, according to the Sixth Commandment, *You shall not commit adultery*, that our elected officials preserve the wise and wonderful gift of marriage between a man and a woman, that they fight against pornography, that they protect the well-being of children from sexual abuse, and that they uphold a chaste, pure and decent life in this society;

That, according to the Seventh Commandment, *You shall not steal*, that *our elected officials suppress and prosecute corruption*, that *people who do not have their daily bread*, that *such would be provided for by us*, *their neighbors and also through our taxes*, so that *people not be tempted to steal*; and that honesty in commerce prevail for the common good of all;

That, according to the Eighth Commandment, *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor*, that our elected officials ask for forgiveness where they have wrongly spoken of their opponents, that they protect the reputations of all, that they use the gift of speech to build up and to not tear down, that they choose their words carefully and wisely, and that they preserve our gift of free speech;

That, according to the Ninth and Tenth Commandments, *You shall not covet your neighbor's house* and *You shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor*, that our elected officials would curtail greed and the mismanagement of our gifts of taxes, our rendering to Caesar what is Caesar, that people be led to live lives of contentment, thankful and appreciative of their daily bread.

And finally, that our government allow Christ's body, the Church, in this land, to continue to worship in freedom, without fear or persecution, without containment or suppression, that we may be able to keep God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as the only God in our lives, as the First Commandment bids us, that we be able to utter His name in worship freely, as the Second Commandment bids us, and that we be able to gather to worship without persecution or government-imposed laws, as the Third Commandment bids us.

We well know that our salvation is not dependent upon the keeping of the commandments. Our salvation is dependent solely upon Him whose cross read, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews". It is from Him alone we are saved. It is by Him alone we are forgiven. But it is also from Him

alone we have the freedom and the power and the responsibility to be good citizens, to pray for our elected officials, whomever they might be tomorrow. May God the Father, through His Son, our Savior Jesus, help us to do this through His Holy Spirit. Amen.