

## Pastor's Counsel for the Upcoming Election

I.

Well, it's that time of year when our thoughts turn to the end of the world. We all know it's coming, but some seasons heighten the atmosphere and make it feel really, really close. If not now, then soon, and if not soon, then . . . November 5? Wait, you're telling me that's just election day and *not* the end of the world? But I'm pretty sure "end of the world" is on the ballot, somewhere near the top. At least that's what everyone seems to think. And by everyone, I mean people on the right, left, and center, as well as those who decided long ago to put their head in the sand.

Even if it *were* the end, that doesn't undo what the Bible tells us about how to live when "the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:16). By us, I mean, us *Christians*, because if we're not listening to the Word, who is? And nowhere does Scripture tell us to approach the end, or even evil days, with fear, despair, or rage. Those aren't Christian virtues. Consider:

- Fear? We're told to fear God—that is, to fear his wrath against sin, not as slaves fear their masters but as sons honor, respect, and obey their fathers. But I can't find a single verse that encourages us to fear men or what they can do to us. In fact, St. John tells us: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). And we know THE love—the perfect love of Christ.
- Despair? St. Paul describes his own experience of suffering as one that left him "perplexed, but not driven to despair" (2 Corinthians 4:8). In explaining the Sixth Petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Lead us not into temptation," Martin Luther calls despair a work of the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature. So when we pray this petition, we ask God not to increase our despair but to guard and keep us *from* it.
- Rage? The world rages when things don't go its way. If you don't have God, prayer, His promises, and Christian hope, I guess that's about all you've got left. If your eyes and ears drink in rage, don't be surprised when you become intoxicated by it. St. Paul clearly condemns enmity, anger, hostility, bitterness, and all attitudes and behaviors that lead to rage. Baptism has put away such things (see, Galatians 5, Ephesians 4, or Colossians 3). So, don't you dare put them back on! For the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God (James 1:20).

This election is *not* the end-all, be-all for us. Pray against and say "no" to fear, despair, and rage. Let the world live like that, but you—"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

When election time rolls around, I love Psalm 146 and our hymn paraphrase, "Praise the Almighty." We'll sing it on "The First Sunday after the Election," November 10, no matter who wins. Consider especially stanza 2 (verse 3 of the Psalm): "Trust not in rulers; they are but mortal; / Earthborn they are and soon decay. / Vain are their counsels at life's last portal, / When

the dark grave engulfs its prey. / Since mortals can no help afford, / Place all your trust in Christ, our Lord. / Alleluia, alleluia!” (*Lutheran Service Book* 797:2). Honestly, the angst seems a little overblown. We’ve already had four years of Trump *and* just about four years of Biden, and the world hasn’t ended yet. “Place all your trust in Christ, our Lord.” No matter what, when the dust settles, He’ll still be on heaven’s throne and ruling and reigning over His Church and the world. The outcome, the future—God’s got it covered. God even worked His good plans and purposes through questionable rulers such as Nebuchadnezzar, Caesar Augustus, and Pontius Pilate. He’ll do the same today.

## II.

We’re living not only in a time that’s evenly divided between two parties, but also in communities that are pretty split. I know the divide touches our families, our church, perhaps even our homes. Every sports figure, celebrity, and public figure seems to have an opinion on what you should do. I’ll give you mine: Vote. Period. If you’re a citizen, then it’s not only your right, it’s also your duty to help choose our leaders. It remains your duty even when your choices aren’t Mother Teresa and Mister Rogers. So, vote.

How to vote? Yes, there’s the rub. Now God hasn’t given me authority to tell you how to vote. What I offer instead is some guidance and direction for us as Christians:

- Read the Bible. Though it doesn’t tell us *whom* to vote for, it also doesn’t give us the freedom to vote for whomever we want for whatever reason we want. Choosing who will govern requires us to use Christian wisdom and prudence. Start with what the Bible *does* tell us, like the Ten Commandments. In particular, the last seven commandments speak to the value and importance of parental authority, human life, marriage as originally intended, property, and reputation. You can draw a straight line from some of those commandments to issues of today. For example, “do not murder” certainly has much to say about abortion and end-of-life matters. With other things—such as tax rates or immigration law—the line from the Bible is less direct. I’ve heard those called “jagged-line” issues. For me, my pro-life convictions carry far more weight than, for example, my convictions about a simpler, clearer tax code.
- Be patient. Not everyone—even within the church—has had their character and conscience formed and shaped by God’s Word to the same extent. We also have different histories, experiences, and perspectives. Again, that’s not an excuse for “anything goes,” but we would do well to approach others by listening, asking questions, and responding with charity. Disagreements about politics don’t override Christ’s commands to “love one another” and to “love your neighbor as yourself.” Be patient. Be civil. We’re in this thing for way more than the next two weeks or four years—we’re in it for eternity!
- Think and act locally. Yes, the presidency is important, but there are many other offices and issues on the ballot, too. What happens in Boston and at Town Hall matters, too. Be even more involved—right here. Attend your town meetings. Serve on a town board. Get

your skin in the game beyond filling in a bunch of ovals every four years. Speaking of local, Greg Smith, a member of Our Savior and head chef of a small restaurant group, shared with me his deep concerns about Massachusetts Ballot Question #5, “The minimum wage for tipped workers.” His waitstaff has experienced a lot of tension, frustration, and fear that the ballot proposal could pass, especially since similar laws in other states seem to have resulted in high menu prices, business closures, higher unemployment, and servers making less money. I don’t know all the ins-and-outs of this question, but I’m sure he would be willing to share his perspective with you. Above all, pay attention not only to how issues and candidates will affect you, but also how they’ll affect the guy or gal next door.

Don’t spend your time and energy being worked up about how everyone else will vote. Get informed and be serious about *your* vote.

III.

Will we be better or worse off after the election? I don’t have a clue. Earthly rulers come-and-go. What I do know is that Jesus Christ is Lord, and—more to the point—He is *my* Lord and *yours*. If I could vote for Him to come again (you know, the end of the world!), you better believe that I’d be voting early and often. Until then, I’ll cast my (one) vote in the coming election and leave the outcome to Him. God grant me a mind shaped by the wisdom of His Word, a heart turned toward my neighbors, especially the littlest, least, and most vulnerable, and ears open to the community right here. I’ll also cast my vote (figuratively) against fear, despair, and rage within my own heart and in the hearts and lives of you, my beloved congregation. As I look ahead to November, I’m thinking not just about the election but about Him—All Saints’ Day, the end of the Church Year, and the platform we’ve got at Our Savior to proclaim Christ through Living Nativity. Reality is so much BIGGER than what we’re being told these days. Don’t forget it.