

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, C

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I want to talk with you today about politics. When I say politics, I am including not only elected officials and the governmental process but also you and me, our opinions, decisions, and ways of relating to one another. Let me give you some context and examples of what I am thinking about.

I am thinking about racism and prejudice. I am thinking about immigration. I am thinking about economic systems that create and promote income inequality. I am thinking about strength and peace that are sought through superior firepower. I am thinking about the tragedy of gun violence in America. I am thinking about those who go to bed hungry and wonder if and what they will eat that day. I am thinking about the struggles and challenges of living together in this parish, in our marriages and families, in our friendships and relationships.

Right about now some of you might be thinking to yourself, **“I didn’t come to church today to hear about politics.”** Others might be thinking, **“This is not right. He cannot do this. We have a separation of church and state.”** A few of you might be settling in and thinking, **“This will be fun. I cannot wait to see how this goes.”**

While politics may not be an appropriate topic for polite conversation, I don’t think it can be avoided in a faithful conversation. Here is why. Regardless of what politics might mean today and regardless of how it is practiced today, it’s most basic concern is about the ordering of

relationships. It is about the way we live together and how we get along. It is about people. Those concerns are central to the practice of Christianity. We believe that God has something to say about how we live and the way we relate to one another. We open ourselves to God's ordering of our lives and relationships. In that regard, the incarnation, the embodiment of God in humanity, is a deeply profound political statement. The life of Christ is a political statement, one that reorders our relationships with God and each other. It teaches and shows a way of being.

So, let me be clear about where I am headed. I don't want to talk about your politics or my politics. I am not interested in Democratic, Republican, or American politics. I want us to hear and focus on Jesus' politics. I want us to be open to letting the politics of Jesus challenge, critique, and even change our personal politics. Jesus' politics has implications for our lives and all those examples I gave at the beginning of this sermon. The politics of Jesus is different from the kind of politics most of us see, experience, and probably even practice. His politics is driven, led, anointed, and filled by the Spirit, the life of God.

Jesus' political identity begins not with party affiliation or constituents but with his baptism. He was immersed in the waters of creation, the heaven opened, and the Spirit descended on him in bodily form, and a voice from heaven declared, **"You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."** From there, he was led by the Spirit in the wilderness,

where he overcame the great temptations and corruptors of all politics: materialism, power, and self-interest. In the wilderness, Jesus claimed his identity and refined and clarified his message and the direction of his life. He left the wilderness empowered by and filled with the Spirit and taught in the synagogues of Galilee. The people liked what they heard. Jesus **“was praised by all.”**

In today’s gospel, Jesus comes to Nazareth, the town where he grew up, to the synagogue where he worshipped, and to people who know him. He reads from the Prophet Isaiah:

**“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring glad tidings to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.”**

Those words describe the politics of Jesus. Good news to the poor, release to the captive, sight to the blind, letting the oppressed go free, and declaring God’s favor are the building blocks of Jesus’ politics, his political platform. They are not campaign promises but a present reality, a reality made present in Jesus. **“Today,”** Jesus says, **“this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.”**

Those words from Isaiah and Jesus' comment on them are the first recorded words of Jesus' public ministry. The words Jesus read from Isaiah are not an exact quotation of Isaiah. Jesus has intentionally and purposefully chosen and arranged portions of Isaiah's text to create a specific message. This message is often described as his inaugural address. Jesus is outlining his politics. He is describing the character of his ministry. He is establishing his priorities and the direction of his work. He is casting his vision for the reordering of relationships – good news to the poor, release to the captive, sight to the blind, letting the oppressed go free, declaring God's favor.

From here on out, everything Jesus does will be grounded in a politics of good news, release, sight, freedom, and divine favor. His politics are revealed in healing the sick, casting out demons, forgiving sins, feeding the hungry, and raising the dead. His politics stand at the center of and are the content of his crucifixion and resurrection.

At the heart of Jesus' politics is an unspoken yet ever-present question: **“Where does it hurt?”**

That question drives and directs Jesus' life and ministry. As Jesus later says, **“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.”** Where does it hurt?

Look at the world, read the news, reflect on your life, and it is not hard to see how much we need a new politics, a Jesus kind of politics. Think back on those examples I gave at the beginning. Each of those is a story

in which someone or some people is poor, captive, blind, oppressed, or in need of divine favor. They are stories of pain and hurt, and sometimes, they are our personal stories.

Jesus' politics is large and all-encompassing. No one gets left out. Jesus does not put conditions or qualifiers on his politics. The divine favor knows no boundaries and has no favorites. That will eventually upset and anger the hometown crowd.

Jesus' political agenda is not determined or influenced by who is good or bad or an insider or outsider. It doesn't seem to matter to Jesus who you are, what you have done or left undone, or what your life is like. It is simple. Are you poor? Good news to you. Are you a captive? Release for you. Are you blind? Sight to you. Are you oppressed? Go in freedom. Divine favor is not given to the poor, the captive, the blind, or the oppressed because they are good or righteous but because God is good and righteous.

So let me ask you this. How does the politics of Jesus compare with your own? Good news to the poor, release to the captive, sight to the blind, letting the oppressed go free, declaring God's favor. If that's the politics of Jesus, and we claim to be disciples, followers, and lovers of Jesus, doesn't it need to be our politics?

What if we adopted Jesus' political platform as our own? What if we began our political thinking and conversations by asking, **“Where does it hurt?”** What if we entered those difficult and divisive situations with that

question? What if we let that question establish our priorities and guide our decisions?

Presence with compassion for another human being would replace resolving issues, fixing problems, and winning votes. We would listen more than we speak. Power would look like cooperation and collaboration. We would have to have the courage and will to stand with another in his or her pain, and the vulnerability to risk letting another stand with us in our pain. We would open rather than close places, people, and ourselves to the divine favor. We would know the fulfillment of **“this scripture”** here, today, right now.

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

That is the kind of politics I want to support and be a part of. How about you?

“Today, this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.” Let’s not let **“this scripture”** go in one ear and out the other. **Amen.**