

Sermon for Thanksgiving Day
“Thankful Prayers for Our Leaders”
1 Timothy 2:1-6a
11/22/18b

I. Introduction: Thanksgiving dinner table conversations to avoid (sports rivalries...Mac vs. PC...or worse, politics: Democrat...Republican...Polis...Stapleton...tax increase for schools...no tax increase for schools...expanded fracking...more setbacks...greater gun control...preservation of 2nd Amendment rights...law and order...immigrant concerns ...Pelosi...Trump...*Oh, boy, if you want a tranquil Thanksgiving dinner, these are probably conversation topics you'd best avoid. But don't avoid the same in your conversations with God! We learn in today's Thanksgiving Epistle that the Church is commanded to talk to God in prayer as we pray for those in authority over us.*

II. Christians should pray for civil authorities that their governing might promote peace and secure social stability.

A. Frequently we carry only ill will in our hearts toward politicians or leaders whom we do not like or agree with. In our hyper-polarized nation, the day after a big election can feel a lot like the day after the Super Bowl: If your team won, you're elated. If your team lost, you're down in the dumps, depressed, eating sour grapes. Many of us take the attitude that if we didn't vote for the guy, he doesn't deserve our support. This is getting taken to an extreme in our country recently (thought it was probably true of previous US presidents, as well) where people go so far as to publicly state, “He's not my president.”

Paul, in the Holy Spirit, will have none of this. Christians in Paul's day and now are to honor all our leaders by devotedly praying to God for them. Notice that in our text this morning Paul even includes “giving of thanks” in what we are to say to God

concerning our leaders! You see, whether we voted for them or not, whether we belong to their party or not, whether we agree with and support all their policies and positions or not, we are nevertheless to thank Almighty God for all our leaders at federal, state, and local levels.

B. Paul urged Timothy and the Christians of his day to pray “for kings and *all* who are in authority”; did you know that Paul lived at the time of the notorious Roman emperor Nero? With his words to Timothy about “kings and *all* who are in authority,” Paul was saying that even a leader like Emperor Nero, who was no Christian and was no friend of the Church, was to be lifted up in the Church’s prayers to the throne of the one God.

C. And why are we to pray for these people? Civil authorities have a huge influence on our lives; they help determine the conditions under which we live day by day; whether they acknowledge it or not, such leaders rely on God-given wisdom and guidance for their effective performance of their duties; the Church implores almighty God to grant them just such wisdom and guidance. We pray that their government will promote peace and secure social stability.

And there’s a reason for that:

III. The important truth Paul wants to convey to Timothy in our text is that when civil authorities promote peace and stability, this state of affairs allows the people of God to do two very important things: to worship Him properly, and to bear witness of the salvation that is for all people in Christ Jesus.

A. First, worshiping God. Paul in the text mentions “godliness and reverence” (v.2). “Godliness and reverence” is to characterize the entire life of the Christian, but the central and most important part of the Christian life is our life of corporate worship, gathering with

our fellow saints in godliness (faith!) and reverence, around God's Word and Sacraments. Good government allows God's people to worship Him in peace, without hindrance, in godliness and reverence. We can do that! **We Americans ought certainly to thank God** for this and for the leaders He has granted to us to preserve and promote this liberty to us! We pray that it will continue.

B. And the other positive effect for the Church of a stable society and peace is that the Gospel may be freely and vigorously spread. Paul lived at a time of uncommon tranquility, the so-called *Pax Romana* or Roman Peace. The relative absence of hostilities in the empire in Paul's day provided the ideal conditions in which the Gospel could be spread far and quickly. And remember, this is good in God's sight! For: The firm desire of our Savior God is that "all men [be] saved and...come to the knowledge of the truth" (v.4). This happens, today, as it was in Paul's day, through the Gospel witness of the Church, as repentance and forgiveness of sins is proclaimed in Jesus' name, and the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are administered according to Christ's command.

So we ought to pray for our leaders, that there may be peace and stability, **SO THAT CHRIST MAY BE FREELY PREACHED!**

IV. As we come to realize what God asks of us in the way of loving and honoring our leaders and our government by praying for them, as we come to realize that, we see that we all need to repent. We repent of our laxity about God's will in these matters, yes, of our downright stubborn unwillingness to be moved by our God's commands...instead we have neglected prayer and even worse, we have cursed and wished ill on many of our leaders. (*And this while our Savior God, for His part, loves them...He loves all these people, and desires their salvation! Did you hear that in the text? BUT THE GOOD NEWS IS HE ALSO DESIRES OURS.*) Repenting, then, turning to Jesus, we find rest in His grace. We rest this Thanksgiving Day, as the Samaritan leper did, at the feet of

Jesus, for He it is who heals us of all our sins of thought, word, and deed by His sufferings and death and shed blood. Christ's resurrection confirms that we are forgiven and right through faith in His wounds. His Supper (the greatest meal we will enjoy today or any day) fills our bodies and souls with Himself, His very body and blood, the pledge and assurance that we, too, are those whom God loves and who are saved through faith in His Son. Our sins forgiven, our consciences may rest. Our consciences at rest, we may enjoy the blessings of this day in peace and gratitude, in godliness and reverence. We may go about our doings and gatherings today with faith in Jesus. And, as God's people in Christ, we may take up that holy task of prayer—of praying for our leaders, of praying for our government, of praying for our president, governor, mayor...for our lawmakers...judges...and all who are set in authority over us in the civil realm. Whether they got our vote in the last election or not.

It's true; depending on your company, politics may not be your wisest choice of conversation topics for this afternoon's dinner. But it is something that God asks us to talk to Him about in our prayers at all times.

May God truly bless our leaders to be a blessing to our land for all peace and stability, that we may live godly and reverent lives as we worship God and share the Gospel of Jesus, the one Mediator between God and man, who gave Himself a ransom for us, and for all.

In His name. Amen.

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, ² for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. ³ For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave Himself a ransom for all...