

Does anyone remember what happened sixty-one years ago this coming Saturday, which also happens to be my older son, Michael's, forty-eighth birthday, what happened sixty-one years ago on September 24, 1955?

Let me give you a hint: It had to do with this man (slide of Eisenhower). On that day, the sixty-five year old war hero and President suffered a heart attack; some sources describe it as "mild," other sources describe it as "serious." For the record, that was less than fourteen months before he was re-elected in a landslide rematch of the 1952 election that had made him President. Whether one thought he was or was not a good President, and while there were questions about his health, I doubt there was any question among the American people — if there was I was too young to pick it up — about Dwight David Eisenhower's personal character and integrity; there may have been some about Nixon's and his wife's vicuna coat and about his aide, Sherman Adams', but Ike held and certainly had earned tremendous respect for his role in World War II.

Compare that to, oh, never mind, but it was the past Sunday's news of a fairly mild bout of pneumonia — but an originally undisclosed bout of pneumonia — that made me double check when Ike had that heart attack. For the record, during his second term he also suffered a stroke, but he filled both his terms and died a few months more than seven years after his second term ended.

Which is a way of saying that I do not believe the health and physical and mental ability to serve four years of either of this year's two leading candidates for President is much of an issue. Personal character or integrity is another matter, but I shan't go there.

But talk about a sad mess where, per the polls, one of the reasons, if not the primary reason, for voting for either of these candidates is dislike or fear of the other candidate, frequently heated dislike. Even worse, those dislikes in the other camp.

And I have two things to say about these dislikes and political attitudes, one coming from our Gospel Lesson, the other from our Epistle Lesson. And summarizing before expanding, in this at times confusing passage from Luke, Jesus says:

“for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light”

That was not intended by Jesus as a compliment to "the children of this age," to people whose values are as those of the dishonest manager, but I want to say that even if one had been coming from leading the Supreme Headquarters Allied Forces in Europe, as had Ike, virtually everyone who has risen to become a major party's nominee for President has some "children of this age" experience or experiences in his or her political success, some dishonest promises, some not-pretty deals; none are saints.

In our Epistle lesson we read:

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, ² for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.

That was intended as serious guidance to would-be-followers of Christ.

Can we really be “Christian” and not regard as our brothers and sisters those with whom we differ on which of two faulty candidates? Can we not regard both of those faulty candidates as, like us, children of God who simply are not perfect?

One of the “fathers” — and I apologize, I am not being sexist, but all those who signed the Declaration and the Constitution and contributed to the Federalist Papers were men — one of the fathers of our nation, writing in those papers, wrote:

“It has until lately been a received and uncontradicted [sic] opinion that the prosperity of the people of America depended on their continuing firmly united, and the wishes, prayers, and efforts of our best and wisest citizens have been constantly directed to that object.” — *John Jay, “[Federalist No. 2](#)”*

Too easily we think that with respect to those with whom we differ on which candidate is more desirable — or to be honest this cycle, less objectionable, -- we ourselves are *wiser* than they, which, John Jay's quote suggests, means that rather than feeling contempt and "dislike" for those others, we should be praying for unity . . . And praying for them, and not because they are less wise or noble than we.

Praying for unity and prosperity — and good health — for all.

We are an increasingly polarized nation; statistics show we tend to live near and socialize mainly with those with whom we agree politically. What is to blame? I don't know; such polarization has been getting more pronounced for at least the last thirty-five years, I believe.

But that period also coincides fairly closely with the decline in attendance at mainline Protestant churches, a decline that I think is a reflection and a result -- and to some extent a cause, of political polarization. *But that's not Christian!*

Look, I am political; twenty-six years ago my name was on a November ballot for the US House of Representatives; twenty-four years ago I entered a primary hoping to run against an incumbent governor who, on the night I lost that primary, that same governor called to tell me I had run a good campaign and to stop by his office to visit. But back then and for as long as I remained in Indiana, I was friends with politicians and office holders from both major political parties. We had policy differences, but we did not disdain one another. We may have thought the other misguided on policy, but not a bad person.

And in a real way, that is an essence underlying Presbyterian theology — we grow from discourse with others, not from talking to ourselves in a mirror.

The Presbyterian system served as a model when the Constitution was being written; in the original concept of Senators and Representatives, they were understood to function much like Elders: trusted to seek to do what is right rather than what is popular.

But it is a shame that with our political polarization and too frequent contempt for candidates from another party and those backing those candidates, we give lie to something which we say when we worship:

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven.

Do we really believe that in the Kingdom of God there is contempt and division over politics? Equally importantly, do we really, if we seek to be Jesus' followers, to be "the children of light," do we really think that the Kingdom of God comes through politics and politicians, through "children of this age"?

James Madison himself, in another of the Federalist Papers, wrote:

". . . the PERFECT, good; and that in every political institution, a power to advance the public happiness involves a discretion which may be misapplied and abused. They will see, therefore, that in all cases where power is to be conferred, the point first to be decided is, whether such a power be necessary to the public good; as the next will be, in case of an affirmative decision, to guard as effectually as possible against a perversion of the power to the public detriment."— James Madison, "Federalist No. 41"

Simply put, the perfect will not come from politics, and none of us, including no politician, is perfect; we simply differ in our flaws and failings.

Let's get real . . . no, let's get "Christian." Let us realize that *all* are children of God, that because the nature of politics is human and not godly, what is morally or ethically right does not always succeed. But let us realize that success in that field — consider the dishonest manager in our parable — does not necessarily correlate with what is right in the Kingdom of God . . . or do we not mean our prayer?

September 18, 2016

Page 5 of 5

I hope — no, *I pray* — that we do. Thy will be done, which means we are to love God and love our neighbors, including politicians and those with whom we disagree.

Amen.