

IV Epiphany 2023

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

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Romans 13.1-7 St. Matt. 8.1-13



Everyone must obey state authorities, because no authority exists without God's permission...so says our friend Saint Paul in this morning's Epistle.

Paul wrote at a time when Christians had virtually no opportunity to influence politics. What Paul encourages them to do...and by extension he encourages us to do the same...to live lives above reproach...and not bring shame to ourselves, or the Church Community. We are to avoid conflicts with the Government.

Twenty-first Century Christians might have some trouble with the last statement: avoiding conflicts with the Government. After all, the United States was formed a nation of the people, by the people and for the people. Paul...as he often does...gives us some practical advice...

*...Civil authorities are God's servants
...Do what is good and right and we do not fear them
...Breaking the law has consequences
...Pay our personal and property taxes because it is the right thing to do
...Show honor and respect for all Government authorities*

There is a connection between the Epistle and the Gospel: God's authority and mankind's authority. This may not be evident at first...but if we pay attention to the Epistle and Gospel things become clearer.

The Gospel contains two distinct but related healing miracles. In the first healing, a man with a dreaded skin disease asks Jesus to make him well. Jesus doesn't hesitate and touches him and he was clean. Jesus told him to go and do what the Law required...go see the priest...who pronounce him clean...and make an offering. God has power and authority to heal people.

In the second healing in the Gospel we meet a Centurion. He is a senior officer in the King's army. He was used to taking orders from his superiors; he was used to giving orders to the men under him. He expected his men to follow his orders in the same way he

was expected to orders from his superiors. He was a man with power and authority.

Like many senior officers in the Roman army, the Centurion has a servant who may have been his chief aide. His servant was more like a son to him. He cared for him and when he got sick with some kind of paralysis and was in terrible pain, the Centurion came to Jesus for help.

The Centurion was a subject of a repressive pagan government with a pantheon of gods. He came to Jesus for help...because he truly believed Jesus had the power and authority to heal his servant. When Jesus said he would come to his house...the Centurion told Jesus all he had to do was say the word and his servant would be healed. Jesus replied the man's faith was greater than anything he had seen...and his servant was healed.

This is the Fourth and final Sunday after the Epiphany this year. The epiphany...the striking appearance in the Epistle...is how we see God working through Government authorities. We pray for our Government leaders because we must. We may not agree with them on every issue...but Paul makes it clear they operate by God's authority.

The epiphany...the striking appearance...in the Gospel is Jesus' demonstration of his power and authority over sickness. He heals by touch...he heals by just saying the word. We memorialize the Centurion's faith at every Mass..."O Lord, I am not worthy that you come under my roof...but just say the word...and my would will be healed."

Faith means believing in Jesus and then acting on that Faith. We always pray for our government and our leaders. In so doing, we show our faith in Jesus and in his power to keep order in our lives, no matter how busy and complicated they can become.

What Jesus wants is for us to show the same kind of Faith that compelled the Centurion to come to him and ask for his help. What Faith really means is belief that Jesus can...and will...help us. And that means believing he already has!

