

“FIRST IMPRESSIONS”    Second Sunday of Lent -C-  
Genesis 15: 5-12, 17-18    Psalm 27    Philippians 3: 17-4:1    Luke 9: 28-36  
By: Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

Karl Barth once said that a preacher must have the bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. We preachers cannot ignore what is going on in the local, national and international news if our preaching is to speak to the lives of our hearers. Barth’s advice came to mind as I read the Catholic bishops’ recent statement on this year’s elections here in the States. (FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP.....Cf. below) With the bishops’ words in one hand and our second reading from Philippians in the other, I worked on this week’s homily.

What got me thinking about the political arena is Paul’s statement to the Philippians, “our citizenship is in heaven.” The word “citizenship” stirs up a question I would ask Paul: True enough, we are “citizens in heaven,” but what about citizenship in our own land? Are we “citizens of heaven” to throw up our hands and turn our backs on our own land and exempt ourselves from involvement in the local and national political world with the claim that we want nothing to do with this world’s affairs? “I just don’t want to soil my hands with the things of this world.” Is that our response?

The bishops who published FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP certainly don’t see it that way. They don’t think our citizenship in heaven exempts us from the responsibilities of citizenship here on earth. In fact, it is obvious from what they say, that citizenship in heaven requires conscientious fulfillment of our national citizenship. They call us to “see civic and political responsibilities through the eyes of faith and to bring moral convictions to public life.” Even though we may interpret specific applications of our faith principles differently, nevertheless, the bishops remind us that we must be consistent in our faith, moral principles and public responsibilities. What we believe cannot be isolated just to our houses of worship or our individual ethical behavior. Even though we feel no one candidate or political party can claim our full allegiance, we can not exempt ourselves from the political process. In fact, the bishops urge us to get more involved, not less. We need, they say, to take our principles of faith to the public squares.

Paul uses himself as an example of Christian living. Some people may choose to live according to what they have learned from Christ; while others live as “enemies of the cross”—these, he says are people “occupied with earthly things.” How might we apply what Paul says about people being “occupied with earthly things?” In an election year Paul would caution us “citizens of heaven” against what the bishops call “excessive self interest, blind partisanship and ideological agendas.” We are also advised to “avoid extreme distortions of pluralism and tolerance that deny any fundamental values and dismiss the contribution and convictions of believers.”

The bishops say that, “participation in the political process is a moral obligation.” Indeed, in Catholic spirituality being active and responsible citizens is a virtue. As we engage the political process, we are advised to put aside interests that only serve ourselves. Instead we must look at the full range of a candidate’s issues. We must make our own the concerns of the poor and vulnerable. Our lives are to embody the interest of those on the margins whose voices are not always heard in the din of political campaigns. John Paul II’s words are a necessary reminder during this election time, “We are all really responsible for all.” And “the ALL” the pope refers to is not just those of our own land but, in a global community and economy, we must be attentive to the consequences of our national policies on the people of other lands—especially in the poorest parts of the world.

Certainly the account of the Transfiguration is a reminder that we cannot live our lives above and removed from daily life. After the illuminatory event, Jesus and the disciples descended the mountain to return to their journey among a needy people. Disciples are not, to use Paul’s term, “enemies of the cross.” Indeed, Luke’s told us (cf. 3<sup>rd</sup>. Sunday’s passage—4: 14-21) that Jesus declared to his hearers in the synagogue his mission would be “to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.” That certainly sounds like a “mission statement” for any Christian in an election year! By our attentiveness to issues, participation in local events and by the way we vote, we can be God’s instruments, as Jesus was, to help free those held captive by poverty, racism, intolerance, economic inequalities and violence.

ONE GOOD PUBLICATION FOR THE PREACHER  
FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP: A CATHOLIC CALL TO POLITICAL

## RESPONSIBILITY.

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2003.

Every four years the bishops issue a statement on the responsibilities of Catholics to society. Preachers of all denominations will find this booklet helpful in sorting out Christian responsibilities during the upcoming elections. To order call 1-800-235-8722. The bishops' website is also a good preaching source.

[www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org)

## QUOTABLE

The episode of the transfiguration reminds us that our being Christians has to be lived in the midst of the ups and downs and the difficulties of history. We welcome the gift of the kingdom in history and we become **citizens of heaven**, of the kingdom which is coming to us now.

---Gustavo Gutierrez in *SHARING THE WORD THROUGH THE LITURGICAL YEAR*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997, page 53.

## LENTEN JUSTICE NOTES

Pope's Lenten Message for 2004 Focuses on Needs of Children

WASHINGTON (January 29, 2004) -- In his annual Lenten message, Pope John Paul II expressed the hope that this Lent may "be a time of ever greater concern for the needs of children...for they are the future of humanity."

"The evocative rite of the imposition of ashes marks the beginning of the holy season of Lent, when the liturgy once more calls the faithful to radical conversion and trust in God's mercy," he said. This year's theme, "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me," (Mt 18:5) invites reflection on the condition of children, the Pope said. The penitential season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, February 25 this year. The Holy Father's message for Lent 2004 was released at the Vatican and in this country by Archbishop Gabriel Montalvo, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States.

"Jesus had a particular love of children because of 'their simplicity, their joy of life, their spontaneity, and their faith filled with wonder,'" the Holy Father wrote. "Alongside children Jesus sets the 'very least of the brethren:' the suffering, the needy, the hungry and thirsty, strangers, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned. In welcoming them and loving them, or in treating them with indifference and contempt, we show our attitude towards him, for it is in them that he is particularly

present."

"To become one of the least and 'to receive' the little ones: these are two aspects of a single teaching which the Lord repeats to his disciples in our time. Only the one who makes himself one of the 'least' is able to receive with love the 'least' of our brothers and sisters," the Pope said.

Saying that many believers strive faithfully to follow these teachings of the Lord, the Pope praised parents "who make every effort to pass on to their children those human and religious values that give true meaning to life." He expressed admiration for "all those committed to caring for underprivileged children and those who alleviate the sufferings of children and their families resulting from war and violence, inadequate food and water, forced immigration and the many forms of injustice present in the world."

But something must also be said about the selfishness of those who do not "receive" children, the Holy Father continued. "There are young people who have been profoundly hurt by the violence of adults: sexual abuse, forced prostitution, involvement in the sale and use of drugs; children forced to work or enlisted for combat; young children scarred forever by the breakup of the family; little ones caught up in the obscene trafficking of organs and persons. What too of the tragedy of AIDS and its devastating consequences in Africa,"? the Holy Father asked. "It is said that millions of persons are now afflicted by this scourge, many of whom were infected from birth. Humanity cannot close its eyes in the face of so appalling a tragedy," the Pope declared.

"What evil have these children done to merit such suffering,"? he asked. "From a human standpoint it is not easy, indeed it may be impossible, to answer this disturbing question. Only faith can make us begin to understand so profound an abyss of suffering. By becoming 'obedient unto death, even death on a Cross' (Phil 2:8), Jesus took human suffering upon himself and illuminated it with the radiant light of his resurrection. By his death, he conquered death once for all," the Holy Father wrote.

"During Lent, we prepare to relive the Paschal Mystery, which sheds the light of hope upon the whole of our existence, even its most complex and painful aspects. Holy Week will again set before us this mystery of salvation in the suggestive rites

of the Easter Triduum."

"Dear Brothers and Sisters, let us set out with trust on our Lenten journey, sustained by fervent prayer, penance and concern for those in need," the Pope urged. "In particular, may this Lent be a time of ever greater concern for the needs of children, in our own families and in society as a whole: for they are the future of humanity."

-----US Catholic Conference webpage

#### POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

"Can you imagine what it's like to have your boy on death row? Can you imagine what it's like to visit him there every Saturday and tell him, 'I love you. I'll see you next week,' when you never know if they're going to call and say, 'He's up next—it's time for his execution.'"

----Jeanette Johnson, Mother of Alan Gell, who is being retried because prosecutors withheld evidence that might have cleared him of first-degree murder. [The News and Observer, February 15, 2004, Raleigh, NC]

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I am posting in this space several inmates' names and locations. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know that: we have not forgotten them; are praying for them and their families; or, whatever personal encouragement you might like to give them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, "People of Faith Against the Death Penalty."

Thanks, Jude Siciliano, OP

Please write to:.....

Norris C. Taylor #0401049 (On death row since 7/30/79)

Larry D. Williams #0442913 (2/21/80)

Michael E. Pinch #0324142 (9/11/80)

Willie Brown #11/15/83 (11/15/83)

-----Central Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, NC 27606

#### ANNOUNCEMENTS:

1. CD Available: "FIRST IMPRESSIONS: PREACHING REFLECTIONS ON LITURGICAL YEAR C" This compilation, from past "First Impressions," includes two reflections on almost all Sundays and major feasts for this liturgical

year. For more information and to purchase go to: <http://judeop.ispraleigh.com/>

2. I get notes from people responding to these reflections. Sometimes they tell how they use "First Impressions" in their ministry and for personal use. Others respond to the reflections, make suggestions and additions. I think our readers would benefit from these additional thoughts. If you drop me a BRIEF note, I will be happy to add your thoughts and reflections to my own. (Judeop@Juno.com)

3. Our webpage address: <http://judeop.ispraleigh.com/>  
(Where you will find "Preachers' Exchange," which includes "First Impressions" and "Homilias Dominicales," as well as articles, book reviews and quotes pertinent to preaching.)

4. "Homilias Dominicales"-- these Spanish reflections are written by three friars of the Southern Dominican Province, Leobardo Almazan, Juan Torres, OP , Wilmo Candanedo, OP and two Dominican sisters, Regina Mc Carthy, OP and Doris Regan, OP. Like "First Impressions", "Homilias Dominicales" are a preacher's early reflections on the upcoming Sunday readings and liturgy. So, if you or a friend would like to receive "Homilias Dominicales" drop a note to John Boll, O.P. at: [Jboll@opsouth.org](mailto:Jboll@opsouth.org) or [jboll@preacherexchange.org](mailto:jboll@preacherexchange.org)

5. "First Impressions" is a service to preachers and those wishing to prepare for Sunday worship. It is sponsored by the Southern Dominican Province, U.S.A. If you would like "First Impressions" sent weekly to a friend, send a note to John Boll at the above Email address.

### **DONATIONS**

If you would like to support this ministry, please send tax deductible contributions to Jude Siciliano, O.P., whose address is listed below. Make checks to: Dominican Friars of Raleigh. Or, go to our webpage to make an online donation: <http://judeop.ispraleigh.com>

Thank you.

Blessings on your preaching,

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