



BLESSED SACRAMENT LUTHERAN CHURCH

“The presence of Jesus the presence of God’s kingdom. Jesus is the very presence of God in human flesh, in the world, among humans” — Rev. Dr. Arthur A. Just, Jr. commentary on Lk 17

Dear Saints,

Fourteenth Sunday after *Trinity* 5 Sept 2021

The age of the faith of our fathers is over. The Western Hemisphere manifests all the marks of a collective rejection of God being present and active in the world. With the banishment of God in the West has come the collapse of natural law and the rule of law. The logic is clean. With no present lawgiver who is, at the same time, a present law enforcer (even if at the end of life), there lawlessness and radical individualism increase since accountability and responsibility are forfeited, too.

Virtue sounding liches abound: “To each his own.” “So long as you’re happy.” “I might not agree with you, but I defend your right to believe it.” Platitudes. Moralistic platitudes. Sometimes the positions people hold are in fact wrong and harmful to themselves and others. One such harmful belief is a rejection of the “ancien régime” (the established reign of God). It, with its protective and wise limitations on humanity (limitations like “no,” “should not,” “may not”), along with its rituals and customs, such that reinforce the presence and activity of God, have been displaced to the furthest periphery of the public square and, at the same time, rendered private opinion. You can hold such beliefs about the reign of God in Christ, but please keep it to yourself since we live in a limitless society. Today’s modality is “can.” Yes, you can. Yes, we can. No fear. No limits. The negativity of God, that is, His law and order, is not for the workplace, classroom, city hall or, really, even the home where children have the right to be free from the machinations of such repressive religious belief. No, let them express themselves and so be truly free. (Never mind, “If the Son shall set you free, you shall be free indeed.”)

In the place of the “ancien régime” opportunists, agendists, and elites have filled the vacuum with *new* rituals, practices, institutions, social, ecclesial structures. The operating principle is displacement followed by replacement. Here name but a two. All Hallows Eve becomes Halloween. The rituals associated with blessing God for redeeming departed saints and abiding in the hope of the resurrection of the body, rituals such as candlelight services in cemeteries, celebrating Mass with the Resurrected One who brings with him the ecclesiological reality of “all the saints in Christ,” venerating the saints of the Church, now give way to pop-culture and gore-related costuming and trick-or-treating. Pascha (Easter) goes from being the glorious seven week climax of Lent and Holy Week adoring the Resurrected Christ to chocolate bunnies and Easter egg hunts. Even Thanksgiving is better associated with the NFL than gratitude for Divine goodness. And so it goes. There are *new* rituals and practices. There are *new* institutions. There are *new* social and ecclesial structures. And they all have this in common: Godlessness. They share the absence of Him who provides the foundation for goodness, truth, and beauty. The world has been disenchanting and the new rituals and structures and churches reinforce the vacancy of the divine by instilling it in what *we* do. It is “divine” that we follow the

socio-political communiques of the new institutions. Safety, for example, is next to godliness. It is the supreme “Christian” virtue. It is the highest and greatest commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” The precursor from which famous verse is derived, namely “You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, mind, soul and strength,” need not apply. Consider again what *new* rituals and practices, institutions, and social and ecclesial structures reinforce the Golden Rule without the great commandment.

What we are left with, then, is the pursuit of *authenticity*. Our is the Age of Authenticity. The *new* plausibility structures of society set forth by the same anti-theists as the responsibility for every human being (in the West at least), not the “ancien régime,” but the realization of our own unique, inscrutable, humanity. Yes, it is important to “find” and live out one’s own self-defined, self-discovered authentic you, “as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from the outside,” as Charles Taylor once put it. There will be no conformity to objectivity, but only the dictates of subjectivity. Hence, we live in a time of *my* visceral truth. And if I *feel* strongly about, say, “the science” or policy or “spirituality,” then no amount of factual data or inherited wisdom going to change my mind (read: feelings). Expressive individualism receives its justification from the notion of the pursuit of authenticity ... at the expense of the “ancien régime.” So, as Taylor has argued, the primary or perhaps only value in such a world is *choice*: “bare choice as a prime value, irrespective of what is a choice between, or in what domain.”

This is why we gather how we do. Together, Blessed Sacrament Lutheran Church and all truly biblical and orthodox churches, are taking a socio-political stance in favor of and in allegiance to the “ancien régime,” that is, the reign of God in Christ. The world’s rightful King abides with us and for us. He is present and active. He speaks the truth and, in fact, He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. This wonder and mystery finds reinforcement through the ancient rituals and practices, the ancient institution of Mass, the social and ecclesial structure of Christian fellowship established and maintained by the Word of God. Expressive authenticity only gives you *more* of yourself as a self-justifying agent and a narrative of self-talk only permissible by the repudiators or objective truth. It only affirms. It is beholden to positivity in the face of reality and so merely becomes a tool for permissiveness. We, however, recognize that God has given us *yes* and *no*, and that both are for our good. Both pertain to the truth. Both have the capacity to liberate by way of an alignment with reality. Yes, that’s why we assemble the way we do. Not to actuate the “authentic me,” but to deal honestly with the fallen yet redeemed me on account of Christ and in Christ. The authentic you was established in Holy Baptism and it is that you for whom God is present and active in the Son and Holy Spirit.

Pastor John

Sept. 5	Fourteenth S. after Trinity	Prov. 4:10–23	Psalms 119:9–16	Gal. 5:16–24	Luke 17:11–19
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Seventh S. a. Trinity 5 Sept. Color: Green. Divine Service 3. Processional 908. Hymn of the Day 803; Psalm 119.9-16 chanted responsively at distribution; Post-Communion Cantic: Nunc Dimittis; Recessional 544. Sermon: St. Luke 17.11-19, “Jesus’ Amnesty Program.”

* AUGSBURG ACADEMY: The Parable of Luke 15. Lesson 1, “Orientation.”

* *Logos & Lager 17 Sept @ 6pm, Pond home. Topic: “The Means of God’s Grace”*