

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity, October 18, 2020

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 575, 577, 578, 580, 584.

Lessons: Isaiah 55:6-11, Romans 12:14-13:7, Matthew 22: 15-22.

Sermon Text: 1 Timothy 2:1-6 (NIV)

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

In the history of the world, the United States of America has a unique government, one unknown during the times recorded in the Bible. We have a democracy, a government “of the people” and “by the people”. We get to choose our leaders. We get to influence government through the ballot box, through caucuses (in the state of Minnesota) and through communicating to our leaders and legislators, which is sometimes called “lobbying”. We have a tremendous amount of privilege in our nation because of its form of government and its laws.

So what responsibilities do we have, according to God’s Word, toward government, or “state” as it has been commonly called?

WHAT ARE WE TO DO FOR OUR COUNTRY?
GOD’S WORD GIVES THREE ANSWERS

1. **Pray.**
2. **Submit to the governing authorities.**
3. **Live our lives in all godliness and holiness so that the gospel will be shared.**

President John F. Kennedy is often quoted for the statement “Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.”

As a child of God, you should already know what you can do for your country. The first answer is simple, and it is one you as a child of God have heard often. Pray. Pray for your country. How often have you been told to pray, and what kinds of things to pray for? St. Paul tells us today to “pray” and he is very specific in what he is here asking us to do in prayer. He uses four distinct words: “*requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving*” – the King James Version translation says “*supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks.*”

This section of God’s Word to us begins with the admonition and encouragement to pray for everyone, and then “*kings and all those in authority*” are specifically named.

We come to God with our requests, or supplications. These are earnest appeals for help for people. And who does not need our requests? We who have been so blessed – spiritually and materially – find that many people – as difficult as we may think we ourselves have it – have things much worse.

We come to God with our prayers, that is, our regular conversations with God about the needs of all people. We are to approach God with our needs, too, although God knows what those needs are. By going to God in prayer we recognize him as the one who will answer our prayers.

We come with intercessions. In the Old Testament, the priests, and especially the high priest came before God with intercessions or pleadings to God on behalf of both believers and unbelievers alike. This is praying on behalf of someone else. Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God interceding with his heavenly father for all men – and for us. We can intercede for others. Our sermon text makes it clear that the chief reason for our interceding for others is so that they may be saved eternally.

And we know how anyone may be saved eternally. It is through faith in Jesus Christ, God's only-begotten Son. Jesus died for the sins of all men and gave us the Gospel, the good news of our salvation. He suffered the torments of hell in our place. Believe that, and eternal life is yours! We cannot do anything to earn our way into heaven. God in his love sent Jesus to redeem us.

And we come with thanksgiving. We are to give thanks to God for everything, even if we don't think we have all that we need. Don't we grumble about the food we have on the table when we don't like it or wish we had more or something different? Well, we have food to eat. Don't we grumble about the condition of our house and the work that it needs? Well, we have a roof over our heads. Don't we grumble about not having the shoes or the clothes we want? You may even remember the old human proverb about the man who was feeling sorry for himself because he didn't have shoes until he met a man with no feet. Churches in our country are encouraged to dedicate one day in the church year because the president of the United States calls it a day of thanksgiving. God's children can, should, and do celebrate every day as a day of thanksgiving, not just one Thursday in November. We lift up our voices and prayers in thanksgivings toward the God who is pleased to give more than he is asked.

But Paul here asks Christians to pray, in particular, ***“for kings and all those in authority.”*** And here we see one place where the spheres of Church and State cross paths. Those citizens of a country on earth – if they also are citizens of heaven through faith in Jesus Christ – can exercise their best citizenship by praying to the heavenly Father and eternal King about their earthly leaders. They can ask God to provide Godly leaders.

Marin Luther is one of many who spoke and wrote extensively of the separate spheres of church and state. In his day the Roman Catholic Church still claimed power over government authorities. There are many in the world and even in our nation who think that the church must exercise much greater power in and over government. However, the framers of the constitution of the United States made it clear that there should be no official state religion. The third article of the Bill of Rights reads “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion”.

Our Epistle lesson makes it clear that government has its responsibilities and uses the payment of taxes to support its work as an excellent example of the role of government and how it should be paid for by its citizens. In our Gospel lesson Jesus speaks of taxes to Caesar, the earthly ruler. However, even though Jesus taught about the proper payment of taxes, the Jews falsely accused him of forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar!

But what is to be the role of Christians in the governing of the nation, states, counties, cities, and townships in our democracy? Although the church as an organization is to be concerned about life after death, individual Christians have a dual citizenship. Our hymnal tells us “I'm but a stranger here, heaven is my home”, emphasizing that our life on earth is just a short visit compared to life in eternity prepared and earned for us by Jesus Christ.

As we already made clear, the Christian is to pray; to pray for all men and especially for kings and for all in authority. The qualities or characteristics we would most like to see in our leaders are those that make for genuine peace and security in our nation, and as much as possible, in the entire world. Christians can exercise their best earthly citizenship by praying about their earthly leaders. Although my president, governor, king, or any government leader may not share my Christian faith, I can still pray that the Lord God would support him insofar as he seeks to promote a safe, just and prosperous society for all. Paul even gives a reason for praying for our leaders: ***“that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.”*** We certainly want to live our lives in peace and not fear for our lives in our homes and in our streets and places of business.

That means that we, too, will submit to the governing authorities as we heard in our Epistle lesson: ***“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.”*** It is our responsibility to obey the laws our governments enact, not to seek ways around those laws. We have the special privilege in our democracy of seeking to change the things and laws we do not like. Our nation right now is engaged in preparing for elections of officials at all levels, from the president of the United States to local leaders. Christians can speak our opinions, can promote candidates, and can speak out on and promote issues important to us. But we must remember the Eighth Commandment and not tell lies about

people, must not slander them, or defame them, or give them a bad name. We must speak truthfully. Even a pastor, as a private citizen, has such a right to speak out. However, you will not likely hear him publicly endorsing candidates with his opinions. I will gladly publicly speak out on issues where God's Word plainly speaks. But I do not wish my personal opinions to be mistaken by anyone for any official position of our church or church body. As your pastor, I have the privilege and responsibility of speaking to you weekly, and publishing a weekly church bulletin and must plainly use that privilege to proclaim "Thus saith the Lord", "This is what God says."

But regardless of whether we agree with laws the government has put in place or not, we are to obey them. We have the freedom to try and change them, but we are to obey them as long as they are in force. And we are to do this in a spirit of love, as we submit to Christ and his word in all things.

Did you notice one of God's goals for these prayers for all those in authority, from the highest authority on down? "***That we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.***" We are not just praying for an easier time on earth, but that certainly is one of the benefits of praying for our leaders and God granting us good government.

Our text goes on: "***This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men--the testimony given in its proper time.***" God's will is clear. He wants all men to come into contact with the gospel, to believe it and to be saved. Freedom of religion is still a most precious gift in our nation. We have the freedom to proclaim the gospel of salvation at any time and in any place. But even if we did not, we are still to proclaim that Gospel. It is just easier when our prayers include our leaders and we – and all men – submit to government. Jesus Christ is the only way to God, the only mediator. He gave himself as a ransom for all men. Let us reach out to all men.

Today, this very day, we can give testimony! Now is the time of grace for this world. On judgment day, God's final testimony will be given to all men. Then will be too late to come to faith. The Gospel must be preached today!

May God grant that our prayers to provide for God-fearing leaders be answered. May God grant that we pray for all government officials so that we may live God-pleasing lives in peace and honesty. May God grant that all men submit to the governing authorities. And May God grant that we lead lives in all godliness and honesty so that the gospel be proclaimed to the world! Amen.