

A REFLECTION ON THE ELECTION

By Jimmy Seghers

There is a great deal that can and will be said and written about our recent election for the president of the United States. On the positive side, all Americans should be proud of the fact that bigotry is essentially a bad memory with the election of Barack Obama. I vividly remember the joy I felt when the first Catholic was elected president, so I can identify with the pride that African Americans feel with the election of Senator Obama. Another positive note was the sight of so many Americans involved in casting their right to vote. The long lines were beyond anything I had witnessed in any previous presidential elections.

On the negative side is the reality that our country elected a president in a political party dedicated to preserving and expanding abortion. For many Christians this is the overriding moral issue of our time. For those who understand the vital necessity of God's blessings on our country, no other issue is remotely of the same importance. In a psalm attributed to Solomon, God inspired these words:

“Unless the Lord builds the house [dynasty, kingdom, country], those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain” (Ps 127:1-2).

Prior to the election many Catholics and other Christians offered up as many as 40 days or more in prayer that God would guide Americans to vote for a candidate that would not support the culture of death that has cost the lives of nearly fifty million innocent babies – a horror of a magnitude that escapes our imagination! As a result the election of Senator Obama was a sledgehammer blow to many that elicited sentiments of anger, discouragement, and fear. It is precisely this understandable reaction that I wish to address.

In his profoundly insightful little book, *The Apostles*, Pope Benedict XVI recalled an incident that occurred between Jesus and Peter. After Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter and promised he would make him the human head of his Church (Mt 16:13-20), Jesus informed his Apostles of his impending death in Jerusalem. Peter responded emotionally:

“And Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘God forbid, Lord’” (Mt 16:22).

A few minutes earlier, Jesus declared to Peter, ‘flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven’ (Mt 16:17). Now Peter is only listening to flesh and blood – himself. He brashly presumed that he knew what was best, and dared to rebuke Wisdom incarnate. Ominously, the words “took him” was the same expression in the Greek text that describes the devil taking Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple (Mt 4:5). Peter's action merited the stinging reprimand, “Get behind me, Satan” (Mt 16:23)! Jesus' words are remarkably similar to the command Jesus used to rout the devil during the temptation in the desert (Mt 4:10).

Pope Benedict XVI lends his wonderful insight to this incident by applying it to us:

“We too have a desire for God, we too want to be generous, but we too expect God to be strong in the world and to transform the world *on the spot, according to our ideas and the needs that we perceive* [like Peter].

God chooses a different way, God chooses the way of the transformation of hearts in suffering and in humility. And we, like Peter, must convert, over and over again. We must follow Jesus and not go before him: it is he who shows us the way.”¹

Well, someone might ask, “What about all our prayers, did they go unanswered?” No! But they were answered in accord with God’s perfect will. St. Paul illustrates this with a prayer more fervent than any we have made either individually or collectively:

“In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and *he was heard* for his godly fear. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience [love] through what he suffered; and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him” (Heb 5:7-9).

In the midst of political reverses and temporal calamities, we are secure in our Heavenly Father, a God who chastises us only to render us better, and permits evil only to draw good from it. The deceiver who introduced disorder into the world unsuccessfully attempts to disturb and overthrow all, but God knows how to attain his ends and lead us to eternal safety. He alone is our hope, our only help. He is our all.

Peace is found in becoming like Christ, especially in submissively accepting the disappointments of life. Peter would learn the lesson of the cross in his life and time; we must learn the lesson of the cross in our lives and time. In this way we can imitate St. Paul who wrote:

“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church” (Col 1:24).

Finally, all Christians are called to fervently and frequently pray for our president-elect. Reflect on St. Paul’s admonition to the first Christians, who were under the tyrannical rule of pagan Rome:

“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way” (1 Tim 2:1-2).

With these frequent prayers for President Obama and his advisors, may we add: “Jesus, I trust in you.”

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¹ *The Apostles*, p. 49, emphasis added.