

The Light of Christ in the World

October 22, 2017 – Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

By Kathryn Jean Lopez

Readings: Isaiah 45.1, 4-6; 1 Thessalonians 1.1-5b; Matthew 22.15-21

Today's gospel acclamation gives us Saint Paul's encouraging words: "Shine like lights in the world, as you hold on to the word of life." And how the world needs it. You know what I mean if you've been anywhere near the news lately.

In order to do that – to be the light of Christ in the world – we might need first to pay close attention to this observation about Jesus from the gospel today:

Teacher, we know that you are a truthful man and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. And you are not concerned with anyone's opinion, for you do not regard a person's status.

The depths of our people-pleasing are legion. Even when we don't mean it, what seems like respect is often really what Harvard law professor and former ambassador to the Holy See Mary Ann Glendon has described as "turtle and chameleon" Catholicism. We prefer either to hide in our shells – go to Mass on Sunday and try to be good – or to blend in with the culture, rather than to be confident and bold about our faith, living the integrated Catholic life in the world (not just at Mass on Sundays). We often don't want to stand out or make people uncomfortable.

But looking at Jesus in his Passion and death is not an exercise only for Lent. Look to him now and realize how uncomfortable he makes you! He makes us examine our lives and see where we are not conformed to him. Do we hide from certain issues because we know they will make for some hard conversations? Do we put off needed change out of fear of what it may bring? Do we act like there's the guarantee of tomorrow – or even an hour from now? Certainly we've all lived enough and seen enough to know better than that.

So then the question becomes: Do we truly know Jesus? Do we truly know the Father's love for us? Do we truly know the reliance we can have on the Holy Spirit if we're keeping close to the Trinity and the Mother of our God, who is our mother, too?

To Caesar and to God

The gospel tells us to "repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God." But what do those "repayments" look like in the world today? Certainly not the bipartisan problem of lending our credibility to a political candidate, or letting our identity become a political party or agenda. We have the grave

problem in our country today that one major political party insists on the preservation and even expansion of legalized abortion, while the other has proven itself quite a disaster on many other fronts. At the same time, there are an impressive number of Catholics in Washington. Are any of them doing anything better?

One program that has impressed me in recent years is the [Leonine Forum](#), which started in Washington, D.C., but now is expanding to New York and soon also Los Angeles. It gives young professionals a deep-dive into Catholic social teaching and equips them for battle in the world. The idea is that many of the problems we face today – from the political scene to the culture to the loneliness in men’s hearts – could be solved if Catholics really knew Jesus Christ and what he did for us. We would want to do the same for others – and not just those assigned to us, so to speak, by bonds of family, vocational, or other duties.

The point is that we have to keep politics in its proper place. We cannot let it become an idol in our lives. When we start talking about presidential candidates and presidents in messianic terms, we’ve lost not only perspective, but who we are as baptized Christians. The world of “We are the ones we have been waiting for” and “Make America great again” can easily forget that we are nothing but creations of a Creator, to whom we owe everything.

Everything and everyone is gift of God. But what kind of stewards of his gifts are we? Do we pile on the anger? Are we hostile to those who disagree with us? How do we comport ourselves on social media and in all other human encounters? When we talk about politics, do we remember to have a supernatural sense about ourselves, a self-consciousness that we don’t know where another person has been and done and suffered? When we talk about abortion, for example, is it always with love and full knowledge that abortion has left millions of walking wounded, often in total silence, with only God knowing their torment? Are we ready to be God’s love in ways that only he knows and only he can arrange? Do we tell the truth always, and with love, always?

In the Words Benedict XVI and Paul VI

Shortly after the Second Vatican Council, Fr. Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI, now emeritus) wrote, “The Church is becoming extinguished in men’s souls, and Christian communities are crumbling.” He wrote that “the Church now finds itself in a situation of Babylonian captivity, in which the ‘for’ and ‘against’ attitudes are not only tangled up in the oddest ways, but seem to allow scarcely any reconciliation. Mistrust has emerged, because being in the Church has lost straightforwardness, and no one any longer risks attributing honesty to another.”

As Archbishop Charles J. Chaput quotes further in his book *Render Unto Caesar*, Ratzinger continued:

[T]oday an illusion is dangled before us: that a man can find himself without first conquering himself, without the patience of self denial and the labor of self control; that there is no need to endure the discomfort of upholding tradition, or to continue suffering the tension between the ideal and the actual in our nature. The presentation of this illusion constitutes the real crisis of our times. A man who has been relieved of all tribulation and led off into a never-never land has lost what makes him what he is; [he] has lost himself.

How many of us are lost? And how many of the lost don’t have us to accompany them?

In *Render Unto Caesar* Archbishop Chaput also points to the words of *Gaudium et spes*, which he notes has been criticized for downplaying the world’s sinfulness. “Yet even that document says,” Chaput writes and cites:

The Church believes that Christ, who died and was raised for all, can show man the way and strengthen him through the Spirit in order to be worthy of his destiny; nor is there any other name under heaven given among men by which they can be saved. The Church likewise believes that the key, the center and the purpose of the whole man's history is to be found in its Lord and Master. She also maintains that beneath all that changes there is much that is unchanging, much that has its ultimate foundation in Christ, who is the same yesterday, and today, and forever (GS 10).

Let there be no confusion. Proclaim Christ to the whole world, as Blessed Pope Paul VI insisted. "Not to preach the Gospel would be my undoing, for Christ himself sent me as his apostle and witness." Everything else flows from him, our identity in him. If we took that seriously, the world might just look different.

Pope Paul VI reminds us:

All things, all history converges in Christ. A man of sorrow and hope, he knows us and loves us. As our friend he stays by us throughout our lives; at the end of time he will come to be our judge; but we also know that he will be the complete fulfillment of our lives and our great happiness for all eternity.

I can never cease to speak of Christ for he is our truth and our light; he is the way, the truth and the life. He is our bread, our source of living water who allays our hunger and satisfies our thirst. He is our shepherd, our leader, our ideal, our comforter and our brother.

St. John Paul II and the Eucharist

Finally, we remember the life of St. John Paul II today, his feast day. In his encyclical on the Eucharist he wrote about how:

The Church draws her life from Christ in the Eucharist; by him she is fed and by him she is enlightened. The Eucharist is both a mystery of faith and a "mystery of light." Whenever the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the faithful can in some way relive the experience of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: "their eyes were opened and they recognized him" (Lk 24:31).

In the same text he explained further:

The Church draws her life from the Eucharist. This truth does not simply express a daily experience of faith, but recapitulates the heart of the mystery of the Church. In a variety of ways, she joyfully experiences the constant fulfillment of the promise: "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20), but in the Holy Eucharist, through the changing of bread and wine into the body and blood of the Lord, she rejoices in this presence with unique intensity. Ever since Pentecost, when the Church, the People of the New Covenant, began her pilgrim journey towards her heavenly homeland, the Divine Sacrament has continued to mark the passing of her days, filling them with confident hope.

This Sunday and each day we can get to Mass or Eucharistic adoration, we ought to be amazed by the humble generosity of our God. Every day it will change us. Let's quit gawking at the train wreck and give glory to God with our lives already!

Kathryn Jean Lopez is senior fellow at the National Review Institute, editor-at-large of National Review, and a nationally syndicated columnist. She is coauthor of [How to Defend the Faith without Raising Your Voice](#) from Our Sunday Visitor.

For Further Reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church, [##2234-2257](#)

Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., [“Rendering Unto Caesar: The Catholic Political Vocation”](#)

St. John Paul II, [Ecclesiae de Eucharistia](#)

Kathryn Jean Lopez, [“Getting Beyond Turtle and Chameleon Christians”](#)

In Short . . .

- ***Too often we prefer either to hide in our shells – go to Mass on Sunday and try to be good – or to blend in with the culture, rather than to be confident and bold about our faith.***
- ***Looking at Jesus in his Passion and death is not an exercise only for Lent; we do well to examine our lives and see where we are not conformed to him.***
- ***Many of the problems we face today could be solved if Catholics really knew Jesus Christ and what he did for us, for we would want to do the same for others.***
- ***If we don't keep politics in its proper place, we lose not only perspective, but who we are as baptized Christians.***
- ***Too easily we can forget that we are nothing but creations of a Creator, to whom we owe everything.***
- ***We ought to be amazed by the humble generosity of our God, which every day will change us.***