Epiph4(2023)

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

*“For I am a man under authority....” Mt.*8:24 ***+***

A Roman centurion was in charge of one hundred men. Each Roman legion had sixty centuries. Centurions were the backbone or glue of the legion. They needed to be steady, not anxious to rush into battle, and willing to hold until relieved, or death.

Centurions always come across well in the New Testament. Every time they are mentioned they appear as honorable figures. There was the Centurion who recognized Jesus on the cross as the Son of God. He became St. Longinus. Then there was the centurion who recognized Paul as a Roman citizen and saved him from a mob's wrath. There was another centurion who learned of a plan to kill Paul en route from Jerusalem to Caesarea. There was the centurion whom Felix, a governor of Judea after Pilate, ordered to look after Paul. There was the centurion who recognized Paul as the leader of the castaways during the shipwreck. There was the centurion who kindly looked after Paul in Rome at the end. The first gentile convert was Cornelius, a centurion. And today we heard about this centurion whose faith **amazed** Jesus so much so that his words are repeated at each Eucharist.

This centurion recognized that Jesus, as with the emperor, could order something done, and it would... get done. An emperor would give the command to invade, but everyone else took care of the rest, from strategy, to supplies, to actual combat. This centurion knew that he had people below him and **above** him within the military.

It often has been said that the primary reason for the organization of humans into societies is to prevent that which exists everywhere else in the world, the law of the jungle. As a result of people no longer living completely on their own, rules are devised for the regulation of behavior for the benefit of all. Whenever rules are not followed a society moves a tiny step back towards anarchy, and the law of the jungle draws closer.

This all ultimately is because man no longer lives in a perfect world. Eden had only one single rule and had **no** and needed no police or courts. All was in harmony with God. Yet, by turning our back on perfect **harmony**, the necessary state of dis-harmony arose. This is “*the Wrath of God*”. It is not so much God zapping people as He did in the OT, but Him letting us "stew in our own juice" by our deciding we don't need him.

By violating God's single, solitary rule, we manifested the belief that we knew better what was best for us. One might analogize what happened next to a boat foundering on the sea. Our once impregnable perfect ship had sprung a leak with the waters of chaos pouring in. With divine laws no longer to guide our behavior human ones became the plug to keep us afloat. As we have turned farther from God we have needed more plugs. If it ever were to give way, sinking into the depths of chaos is certain and swift, as happens during revolutions such as happened in France and Russia and recently in parts of the Middle East. To prevent this mankind has been **inspired** to set up governments, of differing forms.

Indeed, Saint Paul suggests in his Second letter to the Thessalonians that the purpose of any state anywhere actually is to delay the arrival of the anti-Christ until he is **supposed** to arrive at the end of time. For this reason from the earliest days and through all its oppression the Church has offered prayers for the leaders of the state, even during the time of Nero. It recognizes that even those who oppress the Church with human laws are better than the laws of the jungle.

Beyond that, the **Creator** of every-thing out of nothing is quite apt at using what he **did** create, such as humans, to accomplish HIS will. Thus, even the biggest atheist in our government is, at least in some ways--and probably to his anger if he understood--helping to accomplish quite a lot for our Lord in heaven.

To keep anarchy at bay Christians do need to follow human rules, unless one requires a person to do some action which **necessarily** violates our faith, the Golden Rule. St. Paul, cognizant of his Jewish zealots who shortly would lead the revolt which caused the demise of their Temple and their rump kingdom, stressed over and over, as we heard today, that Christianity and good citizenship go hand in hand.

We of course can and should work for the best leaders and best rules possible, but still need to follow the lousy or stupid laws that get made along the way too, unless they necessarily require us to **act** in violation of our faith.. Over the centuries the Church has composed many gorgeous prayers for government and its leaders, a number of which are in our own PB for Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, the Eucharist, as well as elsewhere between the covers. Among them we pray for our leaders that, “they may always incline to thy will, and walk in thy way... filling them with the love of truth and righteousness; and making them ever mindful of their calling to serve this people in thy fear.”

In Christian theology rules operate the same way as civil laws do. Roughly thirty-five hundred years ago, God decided to give us the Ten Commandments to help begin guiding us back towards a new Eden. As we know these can be paraphrased by the Summary of the Law given by a lawyer to Jesus, or simply in his Golden Rule.

When we follow *Divine Law* the state of Chaos is kept at bay. When we do not... chaos creeps closer. In the beginning God created a perfect world. After the Fall, Chaos, like the law of the jungle, necessarily returned as a threat. Again, in short is what we hear called the “wrath” or punishment of God: if one will not be like I AM, this is what **necessarily** is the alternative. It is sometimes used for a description of hell.

Each of us can reminisce about what we remember as a simpler, happier time. It was a time when one could leave his front door unlocked at night, his keys in the ignition when he ran into the dry cleaners, and walk downtown at 1am alone and unafraid. We remember a time when drugs were something at the pharmacy, promiscuity was not in public, and folks were respectful to each other and to representatives of the state. It was a time of far fewer human laws too one should note.

Yet, as America since at least the 60's has drifted away from being a Christian nation where people were embarrassed **not** to be seen in church on any given Sunday. We have more and more incidences every hour of every day where individual people simply do not walk as Jesus instructed. Forty percent of millennials profess having no religion. People just do not follow the Golden Rule. And the 10 Commandments, in particular the last two in our political realm, are routinely ignored. To no one's surprise we simultaneously have seen the explosion of man-made laws.

Thus, each and every violation of law, God given or human written, necessarily brings the law of the jungle a step closer to us. As with water necessarily running into a leaking boat, the darkness of chaos inexorably draws closer as the light of Christ dims. In short, rules, God given or man written, exist to keep humans different from animals and living beyond mere survival.

Because of rules people do not need to be self- sufficient. People do not have to grow all their own food, build their own huts, and figure out what to do with their own waste. Economies of scale and division of labor arise where societies have enforced laws or rules which make behavior predictable.

Benefits arise for **all** such as clean water, vegetables, fish and meat when desired or needed, along with no smelly latrines everywhere. Rules enable other great things to happen which may benefit some people **more** than others, but which otherwise also would not be possible: from art and music to the building of hospitals, cathedrals and universities. Societies collapse (and chaos grows), as in Revolutions, when everything is unpredictable because so few are following the former rules. For this reason the Church always has been extremely slow to endorse revolutions.

While the Centurion today most likely never had studied law, economics or sociology, he was aware of what the Roman empire could do. That an order could be given in far away Rome and it necessarily would come to be in Palestine... **he** did comprehend. Because of rules everyone could do his job and greater things could occur than if everyone were on his own.

Rome was pagan and brutal. Because it did not follow the Golden rule its own **necessary** result was to treat people, until near its end, in a very un-Christian manner, even outside the Coliseum. Yet, despite its pagan and brutal nature, the Lord was able to work wondrous things, mighty miracles, **because** of its law, its rules. The *Pax Romana*  which brought peace from without and from within (except during persecutions) allowed Christianity to spread from town to town from its tiny base in Galilee. Eventually, it would replace the Temple to Jupiter in Rome as the State religion.

Our nation is planted thick with rules and getting thicker daily. Often laws **are** used to attack others. Yet Thomas More, patron saint of lawyers, proclaimed once when arguing about the need to not disobey laws unfair to Christians that he unquestionably would keep them: “I give the devil benefit of law for my own safety's sake”.

So long as humans fail to live simply by one rule, the golden rule, human rules will have to suffice to keep earthly chaos, the law of the jungle, the Wrath of God, from drawing closer. We need to live by them for our own benefit. We need to pray for honorable, decent people of faith such as the centurions throughout the New Testament to be our leaders and to be guided to making good rules. However, it is even more important to pray that all in society may turn towards the path of Jesus and begin to live simply by the Golden rule. For while it is necessary and good that we have man-made rules, we would definitely be better off if... we **no longer** needed them. Amen. +

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