

God is with even the United States:



[Fr. George Aranha, former pastor of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish, celebrated the 8:45 Mass last Sunday, January 22. This is the homily he gave and was kind enough to share—unfortunately without the lighthearted ad libs added by Fr. George during the sermon.]

First and foremost, even though I will comment on politics this morning, I am not taking sides. I am simply looking to find a connection between the Word of God and current events.

Well, ready or not, it finally happened! Donald J. Trump is the 45th president of the United States. In a newspaper cartoon, among the thousands gathered for the inauguration, someone holds up a sign which reads: “Not my president”. The person in the next seat says: “Hillary, let it go”.

Whether we are interested in presidential politics or not, the next four years will be very interesting and very intriguing. What are your thoughts and feelings since the inaugural last Friday? When a couple of Trump supporters were interviewed by a journalist, they were asked to say one word to summarize how they felt: one said ‘excited’ and the other, ‘hopeful’. Hillary supporters on the other hand may have had a traumatic experience of grief when they first saw the results of the Electoral College giving Donald the presidency. Grief, they say, goes through stages. Are you in denial? Do you have regrets? Are you still in shock? Are you excited about the future? Do you feel included or excluded? Are you sad or hopeful? Do you accept what is and are prepared to move on? Please share with a neighbor next to you or behind you.

In our Tuesday Bible study where we reflect on the Sunday scriptures, because of the call of the disciples in today’s gospel, I asked what I called a controversial question: is Donald Trump called like the first disciples were? The immediate responses were: Was Saddam Hussein called? Was Hitler called? I could feel the shock, the ridicule and the anger in that room. Yesterday, the day after the inauguration, thousands and thousands of women and some men gathered in Washington D.C.--and in more than 600 cities in the U.S. and all over the world--to march and to protest and to say the fight will go on.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta once said: “Some people come into our lives as blessings; some people come as lessons!” What lessons can we learn from our experience of the last 18 months?

Some people have remarked that we are today more the Divided States of America than the United States. So in our present reality we can relate to St. Paul’s message to the Corinthians. He had established the Corinthian community about 51 A.D. But several years later he received reports of divisions and factionalism, and openly immoral behavior, in this international coastal city, and aberrations even in the celebration of the Lord’s supper. Every family and every community has issues and problems. The problem of divisions within the church is one of Paul’s major concerns. Some members of the Corinthian church aligned themselves exclusively with a particular teacher or preacher of the good news. St. Paul insists that Christians belong to no one but Christ. Teachers like Peter, Apollos or Paul proclaim the Gospel—but Christ himself is the good news. The good news about America is Americans like you and me. It is not the president or members of his cabinet. They can be held accountable if, as Pope Francis has said to President Trump, they do not commit themselves to human dignity and the common good.

In Isaiah the land belonging to the northernmost tribes of Israel, called Zebulun and Naphtali, were first seized by the Assyrian army in 721 B.C. Despite these powerful Assyrian invaders, Isaiah exhorts God’s people to cease seeking alliances with foreign nations for protection from invasion. Rather, they must ally themselves with the Lord alone. They must trust in the power of the Lord. The deeper lesson in this reading from Isaiah is that God is with us even in our darkness. When we walk in darkness trusting in the Lord we will rise up from our gloom and despair and see with joy the light of salvation. Isaiah describes a future king, the true son of David who will completely and totally rely on the Lord. In later centuries, as we heard in today’s Gospel, the Christian community understood Isaiah’s vision of a coming descendant of David in light of Jesus, the promised messiah

When Jesus begins to preach, his first message is: “repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.” The literal French word for repent is *repenser*: to think again. With the installation of a new president, Americans are called to repent: to think again about leadership, democracy, the economy, the environment and climate change, immigration, health care for all, nuclear weapons, radical Islamic terrorism, world trade and so on. In the end, the United States is not only about the president but about every American called to responsibility and action. Just as the first disciples put aside their nets, boats and even families to follow Jesus, let us also put aside our prejudices, narrow mindedness and divisions for the good of all. In the kingdom of God all are welcome. #