

Among the many incredible paintings you find at the Louvre in Paris is “The Coronation of Napoleon,” painted by Jacques-Louis David. It was commissioned by the emperor Napoleon and what strikes you when you look at it is Napoleon himself. Mind you, this is a coronation - and typically the crown would be placed on the king or the emperor. In this case, however, Napoleon is center in the painting; he is holding the crown slightly above himself, Josephine is kneeling before him, not the pope; Pope Pius VIII is off to the right seated, and a number of other clerics and nobles look on. What’s hard not to take from the painting is who is in charge here; namely Napoleon, as he’s not the one kneeling before the altar or the pope, but the one to whom everyone is looking.

Needless to say, not all that Napoleon did was bad. In fact, he helped mend Church-State relations in France after the Revolution had done much damage to the Church. But, one could also argue he also exercised poor judgment in his ambitions; that his ego was quite large, and ultimately he was more concerned with glory than the welfare of France. He was admired by some; feared by many; and ultimately had a moment in the sun that faded away.

I never have experienced a coronation, but the world will get to see one before long when the new King of England is crowned at Westminster Abbey.

The last one occurred on June 2, 1953, when Elizabeth II was crowned Queen (though she had already become queen technically).

In one of the interviews that occurred in the days following her death last week, a journalist asked a question about the coronation, which was “the Queen was anointed at the coronation, wasn’t she? Did this make a difference to how she saw her role?”

It would seem the the answer to this, in how she lived her life, was “yes.” Anointing is something that signifies a person being given a new place in the community of God’s people. A priest’s hands for instance, are anointed with chrism; the priest’s role is to help bring people closer to God and offer the sacrifice of the Mass. The priest is not to focus on himself; but rather is there for the community to help facilitate peace and their well-being. Ideally, a leader would do this too.

This was how Elizabeth saw her reign as queen. Archbishop Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury, notes that at times, Queen Elizabeth would show visitors to Windsor Castle the small book of daily devotions from the weeks leading up to the coronation itself - prayers and meditations that had been written for her by the then-archbishop of Canterbury. He notes it was obvious these meditations sunk in deeply, and shaped her life. In her public addresses, especially at Christmas, she would talk about her Christian faith, never obtrusively or aggressively, but in a way that made it absolutely clear that she knew where she derived her vision and her strength. In fact in her first Christmas broadcast in 1952, the newly enthroned queen asked "Pray for me...that God may give me wisdom and strength to carry out the solemn promises I shall be making, and that I may faithfully serve Him and you, all the days of my life."

She wrote those Christmas addresses herself, and in December 2000 noted "for me the teachings of Christ and my own personal accountability before God provide a framework in which I try to lead my life." For her, she was God's servant; not a god herself.

In the ancient, non-Christian world though pagan monarchs like Caesar were considered a half-god or even a deity themselves. Christian monarchs though are to see themselves as always having rule under the King of Kings; hence the anointing, which is to remind the monarch they are to help the people have a path to the kingship of Christ. Prior to Elizabeth. Queen Victoria helped re-shape the British Empire by shaping a multi-generational war against slavery; when the empire was extended, it was to have the injunction to end slavery wherever it was found. And under Elizabeth, she reigned with an attitude of caring for all people - which is why she was so universally loved; people saw the good of humanity in her which is why the line to pay respects is upwards of 20 hours.

Having a quiet faith, she lived it out in so many ways. She told people to value their faith; she turned to her faith in the hard moments of life, such as when her sister, Prince Margaret and the Queen Mother died in 2002, saying to the people of England, "I know just how much I rely on my own faith to guide me through the good times and the bad. Each day is a new beginning. I know that the only way to live my life is to try to do what is right, to take the long view, to give of my best in all that the day brings, and to put my trust in God." She showed tolerance; not just a bumper sticker

slogan but showing respect for people's faith by being at a multifaith gathering at Lambeth Palace in Canterbury in 2012. She also met 5 popes, including most recently Pope Francis in 2013 to mark 100 years of the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between the UK and the Holy See. In 1982, John Paul II visited England, marking the first visit of a pope in Britain.

And then there was of course the things she did throughout her life in the name of service. She joined the women's branch of the British Army - the Auxiliary Territorial Service - during WWII, becoming the first female member of the royal family to serve as a full-time, active member of the military. You can find old photos of her as a mechanic - when would drive and maintain vehicles. She was a patron of the British Red Cross since 1949, visiting many people, including a hut where nurses and doctors were treating tuberculosis patients in 1951, and then years later in 2017 she visited victims of the Manchester bombing in 2017. She was also a regular at a children's hospital, Great Ormond Street Hospital, and was a patron of Friends of the Elderly that helped seniors in need. And late in her reign, she didn't forget about Angela Kelly, 64, who is a shipyard worker's daughter from Liverpool, who was a part of the royal staff for her fashion expertise.

She became the queen's confidant, and kept her spirits up during Covid, often doing her hair (her title was personal assistant and dress maker to the Queen). The queen made sure when she died she could keep the special home she lived in near Windsor Castle.

It echoed her words in 2021, her last Christmas Message, when she said:

***“We continue to be inspired by the kindness of strangers and draw comfort that—even on the darkest nights—there is hope in the new dawn. Jesus touched on this with the parable of the Good Samaritan. The man who is robbed and left at the roadside is saved by someone who did not share his religion or culture. This wonderful story of kindness is still as relevant today. Good Samaritans have emerged across society showing care and respect for all, regardless of gender, race, or background, reminding us that each one of us is special and equal in the eyes of God.”***

Her point was that we, as humans, are to serve all. Said Carl Trueman, a professor of biblical and religious studies at Grove City College in England,

she is a person who, unlike many heads of state today and in history, you can say “when you grow up, you want to be like her.”

Indeed, I think the reason she is being honored around the world by so many countries, and why you see this outpouring of respect from so many is that she was a sign in the world of the ideal leader - one who is inspired by their faith by understanding what it means to lead. People look to her and see not just someone dressed in a perfectly matched dress and hat; they look to her and say “this is good,” a person who is in a position of leadership and power, but using that power for the common good. Making this world a bit of a better place than it was than the one she came into. Making a difference. Using power in the right way.

History though is full of monarchs and political leaders, good and bad. And we as humans have different beliefs on this.

One one extreme is that which says all order must go; for instance the notion that all institutions that have power should be suspected; that power is always used to oppress the weak. And so some say tear it all down; we saw this unfold in the French Revolution, in the murder of the Russian Czar

and his family by the communists, and even, as Bishop Robert Barron notes in his homily this week, in the summer of 2020 when in response to what happened to George Floyd you had these riots and people saying let's defund (not reform) the police, let's tear down the physical structures that embody this power (as we all saw with the burning of the third precinct building in Minneapolis during those awful days in June of 2020). This thinking is nothing new; just look up song "God Save the Queen" not the national anthem, but the punk rock song by Johnny Rotten's band as the anarchy anthem of the 1970s.

The problem though is much like in the George Orwell classic "Animal Farm," where some of the animals succeed in killing the farmer and taking over the farm, there is no getting around the ego and impacts of original sin. Having a power void where it is just every man for himself causes bad things in society. So too is idol worship, deifying a leader.

It's also anti-Christian; because Christianity does not demonize power. Rather, God is all powerful, and authority is derived from God. Paul was very much aware of this. Listen again to his words from our second reading today: ***"First of all, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and***

***thanksgivings be offered for everyone, for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity.”***

Conversely, the flip side is also true. We also hear in our first reading how power can be abused. Amos the prophet speaks to us of people in power using it to help themselves first; they are waiting for the religious festivals to be over so they can go back to exploiting the poor.

What then, should we as Christians do with respect to those in authority and our own exercise of authority? How do we look at those who are in positions of government? I'd suggest that we remember order is important to society and in people like Elizabeth II you see some of the very best in temporal leadership. On our part, it's up to us to pray for all those who are leaders while having the balanced view towards them, but to also challenge them through being active citizens, and using our power to effect change.

With respect to what I call “the balanced view,” there is again on the one hand those who want to “burn it all down” and who mistrust all in authority. Again, we recognize then necessity of civic leaders, of the police, of an

army - which is why we pray for them often. Unfortunately there exists in our day and age this intense polarization; and it's not unique to 2022 or recent times. But what can happen is the intense passions we have for our political viewpoints, often a good thing in and of themselves, can cause us to really despise people or leaders from the other side. Paul would have every reason to hate the emperor - remember he's executed in part because of the emperor. Christians at this time are enemies of the state. And yet he says pray for the emperor. I've prayed for leaders I did not vote for. So first and foremost we need to remember government, law and order are necessary things. With that, we do not demonize power in and of itself. And we should not hate someone because of their politics. Rather, we need to recognize that systems should often be reformed, but if you have nothing, you'll have chaos.

However, note the other danger - the danger of abuse of power that Amos speaks about. There are some leaders who are like the people in that first reading; who care only about themselves, who have misused that power. And this is why as citizens, we want to be on guard against worshipping a political leader as some type of god. You often see enthusiasm for a candidate, but some people are so loyal to a politician, they can see no

wrong and are blinded; in essence they deify the person like Romans would to Caesar. The flip side is true too; a person may hate the person so much based on their personality or things they say, but they aren't paying any attention to the issues the person stands for or against. No matter what our party, it's important to know the issues, where a candidate stands, and honestly ask ourselves are we thinking about the issues or the person. I've worked with people over the years who have talked a good game and had a great personality but also been a bad choice for their position, and people who have been a bit abrasive or difficult in their personalities but done their jobs exceptionally well for the parish. As citizens, we are the bosses of the politicians - so let's make sure to use prudence when hiring them.

Third, on that part - our political power. We as citizens need to think about the people in power, and how they reflect our Catholic faith. Catholic Social Teaching covers many issues, and we need to think about these as we vote. There are some that are of greater moral magnitude, however. Our Bishops state in "Faithful Citizenship": "The threat of abortion remains our ***preeminent*** priority because it directly attacks life itself, because it takes place within the sanctuary of the family, and because of the number of lives destroyed. At the same time, we cannot dismiss or ignore other serious

threats to human life and dignity such as racism, the environmental crisis, poverty, and the death penalty.” Much as been spoken of on the life issue of late, in particular since the *Dobbs vs. Jackson Women’s Health* decision. We are seeing this issue front and center non-stop in political ads on TV and on social media as elections come up. The reason the Church sees this as the “preeminent” issue is because it is always a direct attack on human life. No longer can we say it is “settled law” or that it’s up to the courts; indeed the Court said it’s up to *you*. To be clear, a person needs to follow their conscience, and only if voting for a person solely because they are so-called “pro choice” and that is the basis of your vote is that morally wrong. However, some issues matter more than others; attacks on unborn human life are clear-cut. Racism is wrong, and thankfully no one is running today on a platform of racism which would be reprehensible. And even the death penalty, which is thankfully used less and less at the federal level and even in states where legal, it’s important to note it is dwarfed by the number of unborn that are legally allowed to have their lives ended each year. To that, we as Catholics also need to think carefully about marriage and what kids learn in schools and in our culture. The re-defining of marriage has been something our bishops have condemned, along unjust discrimination of those who have a same-sex attraction. Where the rubber

meets the road for us as Catholics is we need to be aware of how these issues have changed society; and the consequences of a “do what you want” mentality have done, especially to our young. We are given moral laws and truths divinely revealed to guide us. As a culture, we have taken it upon ourselves so often to have no boundaries. But we want to think about this as we vote. Even just recently while talking to someone he had no idea what to do with his 7th grade daughter; at 13, she wanted to go by a male name, which her mother was fine with (they are no longer married) and signed off on a form so now her teacher has to call her by her preferred name. This won't happen here at Saint Joe's, and is insanity; a 13-year old is still sorting so many things out. And while they should be loved and supported, love does not mean we do what we want, or re-define gender. It also does not mean we discriminate or shame someone either. Sadly on so many things in our lifetime, we've seen so many stand by and be silent because we lack the fortitude to say “no” this is not right on serious moral issues, from the killing of the unborn, to slavery, to Jim Crow laws and entrenched racism, to re-defining personhood. To love someone is not to say “do what you please.” To love someone means to show on the one hand mercy; so if someone has made a bad moral choice, they know they are loved and cared for. But we also want to help people see the truth. It

also means being involved and thinking how do those who have the power to formulate laws do what is ultimately best for our society and for the soul?

Lastly, we get involved. George VI was the father of Elizabeth, who encouraged her to serve during World War II. But George was also someone who would, behind the scenes, take a stand when called to do so. There's a great scene in the film "Darkest Hour," for which Gary Oldman won the Oscar in his portrayal of Churchill. Churchill is thinking of pressing for peace with Hitler; worried that as France falls England could be next; and the king is invited by some to flee to Canada for safety. But the king is going nowhere, and he says to Churchill we need to fight. We need to take a stand; you can inspire the people, and I will be here to support you. George himself also had to overcome his stammer to inspire his people (famously depicted in "The King's Speech."). The point is we as Catholics, we need to take a page from Elizabeth, from George, and from other great leaders and get involved. We do this by not fearing debate; by talking about why we believe what we believe, and trying to change hearts and minds by not shouting, but by debate. We do it by being people of action too. If you care about the poor, get involved and volunteer at a homeless shelter. If you care about those in prison, get in touch with our

prison ministry program. If you care about the unborn, support a pregnancy center that helps provide resources to moms in need. Don't just complain on your favorite blog or social media site; do something. As a monarch Elizabeth could not be overtly political, though she surely had many conversations behind the scenes. But people would look at her and see someone who cared; not so she could be thought of in a better light, but because she wanted her faith to be seen through her service. Hopefully it is the same for us.

These days, it seems everyone is riled up all the time on politics and it is non-stop with social media and 24-hour cable news. As Catholics, we need to make sure that we are engaged in the world, a world that needs government and order. Sadly, because of original sin, this will always be imperfect. But our founders in their wisdom realized our rights come from God; and tried their best to set up a system that limits power and respects rights of all. Burning it all down and having every man for himself won't work. Nor will idolizing a single leader thinking they will solve all the worlds problems. Even Johnny Rotten, of the punk band whose name I won't mention to keep the homily G-rated, now going by John Lydon who did that song 'God Save the Queen' has said he's no nihilist; in his words "Anarchy

is a terrible idea. Let's get that clear. I'm not an anarchist" and on Queen Elizabeth II said she put up with much in her life and offered a tribute to her in the Times of London. No, politicians and leaders are not all bad; nor are they gods. They are people like you and me; capable of good, also capable of poor judgment. On our part, let us pray for them no matter who we vote for. Let us be involved in speaking our minds not just in echo chambers on social media or with like-minded people over dinner, but in the public forum and with our family and friends who may be misguided. Let us listen to the Church and Catholic Social Teaching and prayerfully discern how to vote. And let us live out what we believe through our service like Elizabeth did for her whole life. The steward in the Gospel should not be admired for his shady business dealings (this is not the point of the parable); rather he used what he was given wisely. Something Elizabeth II did with her power; and something we can do too when we use our power as voters and citizens to make a better world.