

Proper 6 Year A 2026

In 1870 at the First Vatican council, Pope Pius IX moved to ratify the doctrine of Papal infallibility, wherein the Pope was given the last word in all matters of church theology and practice. Lord Acton was a devout Catholic, but was so disturbed by this papal power-grab that he travelled to Rome to lobby against its ratification. He wrote in the Catholic journal, *The Rambler*, of which he was editor, these famous words: "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." His efforts to dissuade the Vatican from adoption failed of course, but Acton continued to be an influential thorn in the Vatican's side

History, one might argue, is a story of power, the power to forge civilizations, the power to wage war, the power to accumulate wealth, the power to direct and re-direct the course of events. History is mostly told about, and by, the powerful... great men, if you will. History, however is lacking when it comes to telling the stories of the victims of power's wielding... Left out, or perhaps only

mentioned in passing, are the stories of the voiceless, the powerless. The former Attorney General of the first Trump administration said that it's the winners who get to write history... and the winners are the powerful... not the powerless.

In his Gospel account of the life and ministry of Jesus, Matthew is very much concerned with power... and in particular corrupted power. Matthew is the only Gospel writer who tells the story of the Holy Family's flight to Egypt. You remember his gruesome tale: Herod, Rome's client king, had heard the rumors of the birth of the Messiah in Israel, and as the legend goes, killed all male children two years of age and under. The Holy family were warned in a dream to get out of Israel; to flee for their lives until things calmed down. So Matthew's Gospel is set against the backdrop of the genocidal corruption of the empire, the violent predisposition of power. And the tension between the compassionate and sacrificial and collaborative ministry of Jesus and the movement, up and against Imperial power and the power of the elite, persists throughout this Gospel. The so-called "Good News" is

the proclamation that one may live a dignified and sustainable life in the face of corrupted power.

In our reading appointed for today, Jesus is giving his disciples their marching orders. Here's what your ministry will look like, he tells them. First, you need to know to whom you are being sent... You are being sent not to the palaces and salons of the realm. You're not being sent to work on your personal prayer life... But you are sent to the lost.... You're being sent to take care of the sheep without a shepherd, he calls them. Any audience of the day knows the allusion. In the Book of the prophet Ezekiel, the prophet refers to the corrupt leadership of Israel as "bad shepherds," the powerful who only serve their own interests... sound familiar? And he goes on... he tells them that these people to whom they are sent are 'harassed' and 'helpless'... the translation doesn't do the passage justice... they are sent to the beaten down, and the flayed open, to give the Greek its due. My friends, the church's mission is not, first and foremost, for our comfort, nor for our peace of mind. The church's mission is to go to the ones who have no voice; the ones who are victims of the powerful; the ones who have no chance as to

whether their stories get told. Make no mistake, we, the church, are in a battle to be sure... a battle between the sacrificial power of Love, and the violent and abusive power of the world, self-interest its calling card. I cringe a bit... using the term battle. We are called to be peace-loving after all. But we are in a battle with the highest of stakes... yet violence is not our means... our means are compassion and empathy, and forgiveness... speaking the truth; taking care of our neighbor; welcoming the stranger and the immigrant; caring for our sick; remembering those who are imprisoned; advocating for the shamed and the least of our world; empowering the powerless, sharing wealth, seeking justice, so that social and economic equilibrium may occur. That makes our faith intensely political. Our faith exists for the common good of all people. Jesus was arrested, tortured and executed for being political.

Social, economic, and political equilibrium might just be an apt metaphor for God's kingdom... Or better said, it is in truth the reverse: God's kingdom is an apt metaphor for social, economic, and political equilibrium.

This is a time in history wherein we must choose whose side we're on. We can no longer play the middle ground. The *via media*, that worn phrase used to describe the Episcopal Church, really describes a smug abdication of our responsibility. We cannot afford to delay for fear of upsetting the status quo, or feelings, for that matter. Pundit after pundit, politician after politician, complain about this nation being so divided... "can't we all come together," can't we respect each other's opinions? they moan... Well, no we can't. The lines are drawn and drawn deeply, not between conservative and liberal, but between truth and falsehood. These are the days when we must make a definitive choice. Are we on the side of Love and Truth; the Way of Jesus, which is about raising up the disenfranchised, the lost and the least to dignity, or are we on the side of the false gods: self-interest; the lust for wealth and power; exclusivity, Racism, xenophobia... willful ignorance, falsehood?

And Jesus goes on: Don't waste time with those who have closed the door on the truth; those who have abdicated their common sense and conscience. Kick the proverbial dust off your

shoes and move on. I tire from trying to convince certain people that taking care of the poor, and respecting the dignity of every child of God is the way we're supposed to live together. The word from Jesus is that there are those waiting for the Good News; waiting to join the fight; waiting to change the world for the better. God's got laborers ready and waiting. We need to be gathering allies, conscripting people of conscience, friends of God, right here in this place... because now is the time.... Because the wolves of empire are at the gate.... Even in this, our beloved America, a country now that extolls the trillionaire... that celebrates our 250 years as a republic by hosting a cage fight between faux gladiators on the grounds of the white house... at the pleasure of the emperor.

And finally Jesus tells his followers that you will be opposed, perhaps by even members of your own family; and it may well cost you everything. Our time dear people of the Way is no different from the time of these fumbling pilgrims just trying to make their way in life as best they can. And the stakes are just as high as they were for them. The truth is at stake; and Love will only settle for the truth. I have been so inspired by the protests all across the U.S.

calling out the corruption of our government; demanding justice.

White people in the streets with their siblings of color: A vision of the new world to be, perhaps. Make no mistake, it will be God's people, that is to say, people of conscience and good will; it will be God's people gathered who will bring about a new and just order. It's not that the system is broken. The system isn't broken. The system exists by design. And our vocation is to plant the seeds of God's egalitarian system in the body politic. God's design, God's vision: equality, empathy, shared wealth and resources, welcoming immigrants, healing the sick; reforming our correctional system... maybe make it truly "correctional." Doing Justice. These are Gospel imperatives, and they apply to our public life. It is time for our faith to go public. It is time for our faith to hit the streets. This is the life Jesus sends us into with his authority... Did you hear that? We are sent with his authority.

Lord Acton was a prophet in the long line of prophets who saw what men with power could and would do. Our baptismal promise is to stand against such evil, and serve the Good. There are countless ways; and countless companions along the way to join this our

cause... These are the days of miracles and wonders; and it's the time to choose, and the time to fight by the bold means of Love. Rest up. Take courage. Do not fear. Our God is with us, and there is no power greater than love carried by God's people.... We are made for days like this.