

Twentieth Sunday *per annum*
Year A, 2026

Is 56:1, 6-7

Rom 11:13-15, 29-32

Ps 67

Mt 15:21-28

It is right and just

“Observe what is right, do what is just,” thus says the Lord in the opening line from our first reading from the prophet Isaiah. *“Observe what is right, do what is just.”* It has a familiar ring to it, don’t you think? Where have we heard that before?

In the dialogue between priest and people that takes place just before the preface to the Eucharistic prayer. *The Lord be with you. And with your spirit. Lift up your hearts. We lift them up to the Lord. Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. It is right and just.*

It is right and just. What is right and just? To give thanks to God. And from that affirmation of what is right and just, the preface then develops the idea more fully. *It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Christ our Lord.*

Not only is it right and just, it is also *our duty and our salvation* to give God thanks. And to give God thanks at all times and in every place, *always and everywhere*, for every grace and blessing that God has bestowed upon us, who are so undeserving of his favor.

This year during which we celebrate our nation’s 250th anniversary, recalling those bedrock principles of democracy that gave rise to the American republic, it is right and just to give God

thanks and praise also for the blessings of our nation, for the hard-won freedoms that we enjoy: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is right and just that we should love and uphold our country, our way of life, but only to the extent and degree that our country and way of life are consonant with the ways of God. This is the call to conversion, that we might every day be more conformed to the ways of God, his holiness, his righteousness.

For many centuries, authorities in the Church looked upon democratic ideas and upon democracy with suspicion if not outright hostility. The idea that the people of a given land or nation could choose their own leaders, pass their own laws, govern themselves, was almost unthinkable. An affront to common sense. An affront to good order. But bit by bit, the implications that each person is created in the image and likeness of God, and therefore profoundly worthy of respect and dignity, began to win out.

It is now almost a commonplace in Christian thought that democracy need not be at odds with Christianity and is perhaps the form of government that, for all its faults, best reflects the nature of the human person, properly understood as a morally responsible agent in the world.

When President Abraham Lincoln attended the dedication of the Soldier's National Cemetery at Gettysburg, he said in his short and powerful address that dedicating a portion of the battlefield as a cemetery for those slain in the Battle of Gettysburg was, and I

quote: “altogether fitting and proper.” It was right and it was just. *“Observe what is right, do what is just.”*

In that same address, Lincoln charged the living with the “unfinished work ... thus far so nobly advanced” by those who had given their lives, that “this nation, under God, [may] have a new birth of freedom – and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” Lincoln’s speech was a also defense of democracy, which was under assault by sin and corruption.

Slavery was a moral corruption that had eaten its way into the institutions of our government, into the laws of our country, into the minds and souls of our people, and even into the heart of the Church. Slavery was a threat to the democratic principles upon which our country was founded. *“Observe what is right, do what is just.”* It was right and just that slavery be defeated and abolished, so that the ideals of freedom and democracy enshrined in our founding documents might be applied to all, equally.

It is when we fail, individually and collectively, to *“observe what is right, do what is just”* that the corruption of wrongdoing begins to erode the integrity of our hearts, of our families, of our communities, of our country, and of the church. The institutions of human society, and in our case, of American democracy, are only as strong as our will to *“observe what is right, do what is just.”* Let me

say that again: the institutions of American democracy are only as strong as our will to “*observe what is right, do what is just.*”

Failing this, corruption sets in and collapse is foreseeable. We have ample evidence of this on the individual and family level. There is growing evidence of this corruption, corrosion, and collapse even on the societal level, as the structures of American democracy and the principles that underly it – decency, fairness, accountability, transparency, responsibility, public-mindedness, commitment to the commonweal – are being ignored, attacked, trampled underfoot, and dismissed.

I give but one example, which has been much in the news lately, even here in Louisiana. But I suppose that awareness of this depends on where one gets the news, as I suspect that some news outlets hardly even bother to report on government and elected officials nowadays routinely signing non-disclosure agreements concerning their work with multi-billion dollar corporations that may wish to place their operations in the State of Louisiana. Recent reports show that 77% of the Louisiana Senate, 13% of the Louisiana House, and various other state and local officials have signed non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) in recent months. They have done so mostly at the behest of giant corporations and as directed by obliging senior government officials.

Public officials, whether at the local, state, or national level, are entrusted with the *public* good. This means that they must not be

entangled in private interests that could prevent their acting and deciding for the *public welfare*.

Is it right and just for public officials and for civil servants to sign non-disclosure agreements imposed at the behest of billion-dollar companies as those companies plan their operations and designs for our state?

It is not. This is a betrayal of the public trust. Elected officials and civil servants are meant to serve the public trust, the common good. When they allow themselves to be silenced by special interests, monied interests, they begin to serve those interests and not the general public. Even the mere appearance of any such subjection to private interests must be avoided.

And yet, some of the most massive and important industrial building projects of our day – data centers in North Louisiana, SpaceX in Vermilion Parish – are being pushed through with little to no input from the residents and citizens who will most be affected by these gigantic undertakings. And our public officials have allowed themselves to be muzzled – all in the name of economic development.

These projects are being imposed upon us as if we were subjects who had no say. But we are not subjects; we are citizens. We cannot and must not tolerate being governed by secret deals, secret pacts, conducted in secret meetings. We cannot and must not tolerate our elected officials' being silenced by private interests and responding

to those interests rather than to us, who live here, and to whom they must answer.

When we ask our public officials about these projects and how they may affect our lives and our livelihoods, they must answer us. But now they can't, because they've signed NDAs. The result: they no longer answer to us. They answer to their corporate masters.

We are becoming something less than a democratic society. We are devolving into a neo-feudal society, where oligarchs and plutocrats do as they please, whatever they please, and the peasant plebes – that's us – hardly have a say. The safeguards of democracy – transparency, accountability, public discussion, debate, and comment – are being bypassed, as the privately wealthy purchase the silence of public servants and take over or shut down public decision-making in order to serve their own interests.

This is corruption, or at the very least, it is a breeding ground for corruption. And this corruption threatens democracy. Democracy is rule by the people. Not by the few, which is oligarchy; not by the wealthy, which is plutocracy.

And so I denounce such non-disclosure agreements as neither right nor just. I denounce them as a betrayal of the principles of democracy. I denounce them as an attack on the institutions of the American republic and on the American experiment in representative democracy. I say that all public officials must disclose any NDAs that they have signed and renounce them. It is

time for legislative action to put an end to this assault on democracy: public officials must never be allowed to subject themselves to the silence and secrecy that serves private interests over their sworn duty to act for and on behalf of the common good.

As we give thanks to God for our nation in this 250th year of its founding – a thing that is both right and just – we must never tire in the necessary vigilance against the corruption of our fallen and sinful nature. We must commit ourselves with unfailing perseverance to *“observe what is right, do what is just”* in all things, in our individual private lives and in our collective public life. This entails a commitment to *acting* upon our Christian principles so that all peoples may know that the one and only God whom we serve is a God of righteousness and justice, whose righteousness and justice must be revealed, not only in the lives of individuals, but even in the institutions and politics of any land that claims to be one nation under God, with liberty and justice for all.

As we began this reflection with the word of God: *“observe what is right, do what is just,”* so let us close this reflection by praying with the word of God drawn from today’s responsorial psalm:

May God have pity on us and bless us; may he let his face shine upon us. So may [his] way be known upon earth; among all nations, [his] salvation.