



**Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue
in the City of New York**

The Reverend Andrew C. Mead, OBE, DD, *Rector*
John Scott, LVO, D. Mus., *Organist and Director of Music*
www.SaintThomasChurch.org

Sunday, November 14, 2004 *83rd Annual Service for the Historical & Patriotic Societies*
Remembrance Sunday *at 4pm*

+

A Sermon by
The Reverend Andrew C. Mead, Rector

+

A SERMON FOR THE PATRIOTIC SOCIETIES EVENSONG 2004

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Let me start by acknowledging the patriotic and historical societies represented here and by thanking those of you who represent them. You bring to the Church a broad tapestry of background which makes up the proud diversity of our country, including the divisions and wars through which we have passed.

We have just undergone another presidential election. However we may have voted, however we may be pleased or disappointed by the election's result, we do have the blessing of being asked as citizens to participate in the choice. We were asked for our votes by the candidates. We are asked to vote by the implicit provisions enshrined in our constitution; it is the most basic material of the social contract that makes us a political entity. This evening I want to speak briefly about what the New Testament has to teach Christians about being citizens.

When churches mix religion and partisan politics, whether to the left or to the right, it seems to me that a trespass has occurred. The clergy, who have political views of their own just like everyone else, are called and ordained as preachers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and Ministers of his Sacraments. Whatever our political views may be, we are not here to substitute those politics for the Gospel or to smuggle them across to you in religious disguise. Christians may be Democrats and Republicans and lots of other political flavors in this country and around the world. If the Church is to respect the diversity of her membership (we call it catholicity), then her preaching and teaching and ministrations will need to be on such a level or depth that her members have the freedom, respect and trust to think and work out the implications of their faith in all the detailed contexts of life, including politics, in which we find ourselves. Good Christians have taken very different political stances for what they think are good reasons.

Having excused ourselves from party politics, what then is left for us to say about politics as Christians? We are left to reflect upon the obligation, and the limitation, of our earthly citizenship; what does it mean to be a citizen of this great democratic republic, the United States of America?

There is a tension between the obligation and the limitation of earthly citizenship. Christ, asked about whether we should pay taxes, asked in turn whose image was on the

coinage. Told that it was Caesar's image, Jesus said that we are to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. We would of course recall that *it is God's image that is stamped on our souls*. The Apostles, writing in their letters, repeatedly say that Christians are to pray for the peace and welfare of the State, to pay taxes, to honor the Emperor and those in civil authority, and to obey the laws of the State in all things right and true. But sometimes all is not right or true, and we would remember that these same Apostles were put to death by the very State they prayed for, because they would not offer sacrifice to the deity of the Emperor or the cult of the Roman Empire.

The State brings law, security, order. It provides for the distribution of many of the most basic amenities of life. It is supposed to protect the poor from the predatory and to provide a court of justice. As such the State is a great blessing and is said by Scripture to be ordained of God. But if the State makes unrighteous demands, Christians have found and may find themselves in a position of conscientious resistance, or ultimately in the sort of bind faced by the Apostles. Nevertheless, Christians have always argued that this paradoxically makes us better, not worse, citizens for the State, by witnessing to the fact that the State, whether it acknowledges it or not, is under a higher authority, under God.

In the long run, even though Christianity was born in the ancient Roman Empire and has long lived with monarchy and authoritarian states and survived under tyranny and oppression, there is still no doubt that a democratic republic such as we enjoy is a long-run product of many centuries of Christian influence. Just a few examples: One person one vote and equal protection under the law reflect the doctrine of everyone created in God's image and of every man, woman and child as the object of the universal saving love of Christ. The separation of powers, the freedom of speech and trial by jury all reflect the healthy distrust of absolute power coming from the insight of the doctrine of the Fall and Original, Universal Sin. Limited as it may seem, that is why casting our votes expresses what Christ and the Apostles teach about the State and why it is an important gesture of Christian life, of being "salt" and "light" in the body of earthly society.

Earlier I mentioned the limitations of the citizenship, and that is how I will finish. The finest society in the world falls far short of the Kingdom of God. Much as we love her, America the beautiful is not the eternal City of God. Christ before Pilate said his Kingdom was not of this world. Our citizenship as Christians belongs to that Kingdom. So as we pray for the welfare of our beloved country, as we praise, criticize, even serve in office, do jury duty, vote and pay taxes, we realize we are pilgrims on our way through. Our true commonwealth is in heaven. And it is worth noting that this very fact - the fact that Christians have Christ as their ruler in the country of their true citizenship, their desired destination and inspiration - that high loyalty is what enables us to be the best citizens possible in the places we pass through on our way home.

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.