

Epiphany Four (2012)

(Romans 13:1-7, St. Matthew 8:1-13)

“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God.”

There are many wonderful components to the historic “American spirit.”

Our work ethic, our compassion when others are in need and the willingness of many to risk their lives to defend the lives of our own people, as well as people around the world, are three of the more commendable.

But there is also a negative side to the American spirit, negative in that the way it has developed often conflicts with Sacred Scripture.

For non-Christian Americans, or Americans that are only nominally so, this is not an issue. But as Anglican Catholics we are not nominal Christians.

We know that while we are blessed to be citizens of one of, if not the, greatest nation in world history, having areas of our lives that contradict Scripture must be rectified, even in this case at the expense of the American spirit. The *Spirit of God* must have first say in every area of our lives.

The portion of the American spirit that often contradicts Scripture is our reluctance, if not unwillingness, to “*be subject to the higher powers*” as St. Paul commands in the first verse of the Epistle.

True enough Christians are (for the most part) law abiding people.

But being *subject* to the higher powers is much farther reaching than not breaking laws. Being subject means being submissive to all authority which God places over us.

And let us make no mistake. *All* authority placed over us is placed over us *by* God.

This fact in itself is difficult for many American Christians to accept.

We are a nation of “rugged individualists” which at some level is good for it makes people responsible for themselves. As the adage goes “God helps those whom help themselves.”

But if we as Christians are not careful we can forget the fact that we are both by natural generation *and* by spiritual regeneration dependent people.

In St. John 5:5 Jesus says “*I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in them, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.*” Did we hear that?

Apart from Jesus Christ we cannot do anything! We are *totally* dependent upon Him for *everything*, including the next breath we will take.

Do we know this? Do we believe this? I mean really believe this? Are we submitted to this?

If we do and we are, then we must also be subject to all authority placed over us.

For most Christians being subject to the authority *of God* is not a problem.

At least what we understand being subject means is not a problem.

A better word for Christian *subjection* is *abandonment*. We are to be unconditionally abandoned to God.

Being abandoned means that while we have God-given inalienable rights as human beings and U.S. citizens; being citizens of Heaven also, which St. Paul in Philippians 3:20 says is our primary citizenship, we *willingly* surrender those inalienable rights to God in Christ for the sake of the Gospel and the building up of His Kingdom.

We actually *become* God’s servants, His slaves, His absolute property as I quoted last week from Fr. John Keble’s 19th century sermon. Are we willing to submit, to abandon ourselves to God to that level?

If we are, being subject to all human authority placed over us will never be an issue because we know, without doubt, what St. Paul states in the second part of the first verse of today’s Epistle: “*For there is no power but of God.*”

We will know what the Psalmist says in Psalms 75:7,8 “*For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor yet from the south. And why? God is the Judge; he putteth down one, and setteth up another.*”

We will know that everyone from the President of the United States, to the Archbishop of this church and the soon-to-be Bishop of this Diocese, to our supervisor at work, to the manager of the investments in our pension funds, to the police officer giving us a traffic ticket, to the clerk at the local grocery store telling us to step over to another checkout lane when we are next in their checkout lane, has whatever level of authority they have over our lives because God has either directly *given* them that authority or has *allowed* them to have that authority.

Because we have already abandoned ourselves to Christ, we implicitly trust that no person or institution (government, etc.) has authority over us that He has not placed or allowed to be there.

In Romans 13:2 God commands us to submit to authority for a very specific reason.

“...Whosoever therefore resisteth the power (resists authority) resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist (the one that will not submit) shall receive to themselves damnation.”

The parallel principle of this command is taught by St. John in 1 Jn 4:20-21 where he writes: “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen. And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.”

Applying this principle to submission to authority, the Word of God says:

“How can we say we are submissive to the authority of God whom we have not seen, when we resist and are not submissive to the authority of the people God has placed over us whom we have seen?”

The fact is we cannot. *Are we abandoned to God? Then submit to the higher powers.*”

Of course submission to the “higher powers” is not absolute.

Whenever any human authority makes a law or gives a command that conflict with God’s Law or any part of God’s Word, then we have to resist. It becomes our Christian duty to resist.

This is exemplified for us by the Apostles in Acts 4 and 5.

First Sts. Peter and John and then all of the Apostles were arrested by the Jewish leaders and brought before them to answer the charge of “unlawfully” preaching the Gospel to the people, something God directly commands all Christians to do at all times and against all opposition, even unto death.

In Acts 4:19, 20 Sts. Peter and John answered the charge with these words:

“Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”

In Acts 5:28 the exasperated Jewish leadership said to the Twelve: “Did we not straightly command you that ye should not teach in this name?”

In v. 29 St. Peter and the other Apostles boldly answered: “We ought to obey God rather than men.”

The Twelve were beaten for giving that response.

Another example of the limits of submission comes from our parish patron St. Thomas Becket.

Becket was willing to give his full submissive obedience to King Henry II with one important exception: “Save the honor of God.”

Being subject to the higher powers in the world is not absolute.

Since all authority anyone has is derivative, derived from the absolute authority of God the Creator, if an institution or person that wields authority does so in contradiction to the One, to God, who has given it to them, then Christians have the duty to resist.

But *please, please* be careful my brethren. There are few, likely very few, times when the authority God places over us may be resisted with His blessing.

Don’t get fooled and pulled into supporting or joining groups like (for example) the “Occupy” movement. God does not give any blessing or support to those who participate in such protests, no matter what the heretical Church of England Bishop of London may say!

When St. Paul wrote this passage in Romans 13, and the verses on the same theme to St. Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:1-3. And when St. Peter wrote his parallel teaching on submission to authority in his first Epistle, remember who were in power: the Caesars.

The Caesars as a group were immoral despots with sovereign authority.

Several of them demanded to be worshipped as god.

If the Holy Ghost inspired the Apostles to teach the people of the Church to submit to *that* ungodly sort of authority, then there can be few exceptions to our resisting the authority placed over us “Save the honor of God,” or when we “*Must obey God rather than men.*”

My brethren, for the most part there is much to be commended about the American spirit. Even more so the American Christian spirit. Both have helped make this a great country.

And yet both have one flaw in that they are not inherently submissive to authority as Scripture commands Christians to be.

Let us be of the Biblical-Christian Spirit (the Holy Spirit), abandoned to Christ and submitted to His Word first, foremost and always, and then be of the American Christian spirit a distant second.

Let our souls be subject unto all higher powers, knowing where the source of their (and all) authority lays.

Let us submit in every way possible, “Save the honor of God.” **Amen.**