

1. Several years ago the Rev. Richard John Neuhaus,
  - a. Editor of the right-wing neo-con religion Magazine *First Things*,
  - b. Reported seeing a bit of graffiti in the subway station at Columbus Circle.
  - c. It was one of those heart-shaped declarations of love,
    - i. You know, with the names of the couple written within.
  - d. However here the declaration was not “Sam loves Stella” or “Tony loves Maria”,
    - i. But “God loves Constantine”.
2. Of course this Constantine was not the demon-fighting comic book hero
  - a. Portrayed by Keanu Reeves,
3. But the fourth century Roman army officer who,
  - a. At the famous battle at the Milvian Bridge in 313
  - b. Restored unity in the Roman Empire
  - c. And thereafter became its Emperor.
4. However, for the people back then,
  - a. God did not love Constantine because of his prowess in battle.
  - b. God did not love Constantine because he became emperor and restored peace.
5. For the people back then
  - a. God loved Constantine because in his famous Edict of Milan,
  - b. he ended the persecution of Christians,
  - c. restored their property
  - d. and paved the way for Christianity
    - i. to become the official religion of the empire.
6. Everything else; the victories, the imperial title the power and the glory; all it was seen as proof that God loves the powerful winner.
  - a. And frankly so do we.
7. It is the reason why in no other country in the western world
  - a. A pastor named Rick Warren,
    - i. Would have the power to call the two major candidates for the American presidency together for a debate, as he did with Obama and McCain last week.
8. And it is also the reason why the results of that debate were so important for so many.
  - a. Because at that church, with that pastor, in the presence of God,
    - i. Surely the one who did the best
    - ii. Spoke the clearest and moved the most hearts
    - iii. Surely the winner is the one not only the crowd chose,
    - iv. But the one who God chooses.
  - b. And we Americans are eager for that kind of a sign.
    - i. Because we think that if our leader is God’s leader
    - ii. We will always be right –
    - iii. and of course, our opponents will always be wrong.
  - c. Who does God love? We want to know – because he will be our next Constantine.
9. Many of us are horrified that God plays such a role in politics.
  - a. Perhaps we should be horrified, but we should not be surprised.
10. For God has certainly messed around in politics before.
11. In today’s first reading we hear Isaiah proclaim to Shebna,
  - a. The master of the King’s palace and thus his trusted advisor,
  - b. That God would summarily remove him from his post and replace him with Eliakim, a man more to God’s liking.
12. But perhaps God’s most personal foray into politics was none other than Jesus himself.

- a. We tend to forget that from the very beginning of his ministry,
  - b. Jesus was political.
  - c. He traveled, just like our politicians
  - d. He taught and lectured, criticized and scolded his opponents, the powerful Pharisees and Sadducees.
  - e. He even had a platform of sorts; a radical vision called Kingdom or Reign of God,
    - i. Where those who were powerful would lose their special positions and be the last
    - ii. While the people, the poor, the last under the current administration, would be the first.
13. Talk about a change you can believe in!; and believe they did;
- a. Little wonder so many followed him
  - b. Little wonder his chosen 12 clung to him
  - c. Because God loved Jesus! And when he won the rule from the Romans, they knew they would be winners too.
14. But then one day Jesus' campaign arrived at Caesarea Philippi.
- a. This town was the center of Roman power in the Galilee.
15. For Jesus to go there was like McCain going to Chicago, or Obama to Arizona.
16. But that was just the point; at the heart of Roman power, Jesus was going to reveal his running mate; his choice; the one who would lead his team and upon which he would build his church and through which he would prepare for God's kingdom and it was PETER!
17. . . . but wait a minute. Those who were members of Jesus' inner circle should have certainly raised red flags; wasn't he the rough and impetuous fisherman from the backcountry of Galilee?
18. And anyone else who knew the rest of Peter's story, from Jesus' day to our own should certainly join in;
- a. Wasn't he the one who abandoned Jesus?
  - b. Wasn't he the one who denied him?
  - c. Wasn't he the one who, only a few verses after today's gospel reading, was called SATAN by Jesus because he refused to accept Jesus' vision?
  - d. This is the one whom Jesus chooses? This is the one whom God loves? This loser is our winner?
19. Exactly. Because despite what we want to believe,
- a. When God chooses good leaders,
  - b. God chooses good followers – Like Eliakim, whom he calls his servant
  - c. When God chooses winners
  - d. God chooses losers like Peter,
    - i. Whom he calls the rock on which the church will be built,
    - ii. but also the Satan who will be its adversary.
  - e. When God chooses, God chooses Jesus,
    - i. Whose popularity faded and who was crucified in the polls a few days before being crucified in person.
  - f. When God chooses, God chooses weakness,
    - i. as it says in our Mass for those whose faith has led not to a successful life but a Martyr's death
  - g. "You choose the weak and make them strong to the glory of your name".
20. In a country where we all want to know who Jesus would vote for and whom God loves, this choice of Jesus today should give us all pause;

- a. For truly to be faithful to Jesus' vision of a kingdom where the first are last and the last first, we should look, not for the one who is applauded at Saddleback, but the one who is ridiculed in the press;
  - b. Not for the one who is a winner at the polls but the one who struggles to get his or her message heard
  - c. Not for the one who is the best and the brightest but the one who is the most honest and true.
  - d. Such candidates, you might respond, do not exist; and we are probably right; for we long since crucified them in the polls, if not for real.
  - e. But perhaps it does explain why one of our nation's most sincerely religious presidents Jimmy Carter, was such a disappointment; while one of our greatest was a man who thought nothing of editing the Bible to his own tastes and disdained traditional Christianity, Thomas Jefferson.
21. Because while God might choose emperors: God does not choose presidents: we do. That is our great gift and our great responsibility.
- a. And thus while God guides our consciences
  - b. God does NOT determine our choice.
  - c. And thank God for that; for when we look at God's choice, Peter
  - d. When we think of all the others who were chosen as his successors
  - e. When we consider all the other weak broken sinful leaders of our church who have come after him
  - f. It is a miracle that the Church has survived for two thousand years, and it is a miracle that it is surviving now.
  - g. To which Jesus, The Father and the Spirit could only say, AMEN. That is precisely the point. God chooses the weak. God chooses the sinners. God chooses us and gives us the awesome responsibility to choose. That is a far greater proof of God's love than any scribbled declaration in a subway.