

Homily for the Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost, September 27, 2026

Text(s): Matthew 21:23-32; Philippians 2:1-13

...Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus...

“By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?”

Our Epistle and Gospel readings in a special way point us to the heart of what it is to be a Christian, what it is to be the Church, about what is most significant and most true about the Christian Faith.

The Christian faith is not, at its core, about some notion of how you manage the life-after-death problem, or about some new system of spirituality, or even about imposing some arbitrary sets of morals and behavior on ourselves or others.

At the core of the Christian faith is the confession and belief that Jesus Christ, as he is attested to us in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the one in whom the One, True and Living God has invested “all authority in heaven and on earth.”

The Crucified, Risen, and about-to-be-Ascended Jesus says, at the end of Matthew’s Gospel, just before he delivers “The Great Commission,” “Go into all the world and make disciples of all

people,” says of himself, “All authority on heaven and on earth as been given to me...”

Everything else in Christian life, everything else in the Church, is contingent on that assertion.

The question that the Church wrestles with in all this, therefore, is not where authority lies, but what Jesus, as he is made known to us in the Scriptures, tells us about the nature of the authority that has been given to him by God, and what that means for those who follow that way that he shows forward.

Authority, by the way, can certainly have negative connotations, especially in our own day. The term “authoritarianism” is almost entirely understood in a negative way, synonymous with oppression, tyranny, despotism and the like.

But the authority which Jesus is given, and exercises, is an authority that is not authoritarian as we commonly use and understand that term.

And Jesus shows us a way that no “ism,” no ideology or other set of political propositions, of the right or the left, can comprehend,

Our Epistle reading today sheds a bright light on the paradoxical sense of authority that is at work in the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Paul uses, as most Biblical scholars who have dealt with Philippians understands it, an early bit of Christian liturgy, called by many Biblical commentators “The Christ Hymn,” to express the way Jesus turns worldly notions of authority inside out:

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, and being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.”

Here, one one incredible sweep, Paul takes us from the very heights of heavenly glory, to the absolute lowest desolation that a human being could experience.

But Paul does more than that.

In Jesus, Paul connects the glory and power of God to the unjust suffering of his obedient servant, and says that in all that a new humanity is born, which will be lived out in the Church that is established in the death and rising again of Jesus Christ.

This is the unity to which Paul calls the Church:

“If there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing of the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete; be of the same mind, having the same love, being of full accord and of one mind...let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus...”

This is not the same thing as a rigid conformity, or a call for people in the Church to have the same opinion about anything and everything.

Rather, we are called to unity in discerning what it means to have the mind of Christ.

This means unity in prayer, and in being attentive to the Scriptures.

The chief priests and elders in the Gospel today show us the way of “group-think” and “mob mentality.”

They question Jesus not out of an authentic desire to know the mind of God, but as a cheap tactic to try to discredit and condemn someone they view as a threat to their power.

In some ways, by the way, we see the same thing going on in our political discourse these days, where, when there are conflicting ideas or claims put forward, the merits and flaws of the ideas

presented are not debated, but rather, those who advocate the positions are discredited and defamed.

This is literally “text-book teaching” in some of the literature which seeks to advance certain ideological causes, and it happens on all sides of the political spectrum. Lenin in the Soviet Union and Joseph Goebels, the propaganda minister in Nazi Germany, were masters at defaming and discrediting opposing views, before any real discussion of the contents of those views could come to light.

Unfortunately, some of the lessons of recent history are lost as we see in the current state of political discourse.

And this brings us to where an authentic Christian witness is vital to the life of this world, a witness that is not enslaved to the principalities and powers of this world, be they of the left or the right, be they power or wealth or the gratification of our basest impulses and compulsions.

As St. Paul puts it in Romans, “the whole creation groans in eager longing for the revealing of the children of God...”

The whole creation groans for a humanity which seeks not to impose its will on others, but seeks to know more fully the mind

of the one who brought a beautiful, bright and vibrant creation out of chaos and darkness.

The powers and principalities of this world, which seek to exercise authority by domination of others, through wielding the power of death, find themselves ultimately disarmed by persistent and resilient compassion, kindness, humility, liberation, and loving service.

This is the authority we exercise in the Name of Jesus, the crucified One in whom all authority in heaven and earth has been given.