

We just heard Jesus say: "You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." Jesus is teaching us something about the use of power and authority.

First, though, what is Jesus not doing here? He is not setting up a system of servitude such as we see in a tv series like Downton Abbey. Downton Abbey is the story of the relationship between the aristocratic Crawley family and their servants in 1920's Yorkshire. In the servants' hall there is a wall full of bells which are attached to wires which lead to various rooms in the mansion. Whenever a bell rings a servant runs upstairs to see what a member of the family wants. Jesus is not taking that system and flipping it upside down so that the Crawleys become the servants and the servants become the lords and ladies and "lord it over" their employers. That would just be perpetuating a misuse of power on a different level.

Jesus was not advocating for a simple reversal of fortunes; he wants us to see power and authority in a whole new way. Power and authority is to be used in service to the common good. Downton Abbey actually does show that in quite moving ways at times but you'll have to discover that on your own. Whatever power and authority we have been given is to be used for the common good and especially in the interests of the most vulnerable. We see this reflected in Catholic social teaching. Catholic social teaching is founded on the principles of the preciousness of human life from conception to natural death and every moment in between. Catholic social teaching upholds the dignity of every human person because every human person is created in the image and likeness of God and must be respected as such. Catholic social teaching also upholds the need to care for the most vulnerable in our society, those living on the margins who are unjustly being denied things as basic and essential as food, water, a safe place to live, and even, tragically, life itself.

We all have some power, authority, and responsibility to put Catholic social teaching into practice. One of the ways we do this is by voting. Voters have the duty to exercise their power and authority by learning about the issues and candidates and voting in a manner which will hopefully lead to the greatest good while avoiding what is evil. No candidate or political party perfectly reflects the teachings of our Lord and his Church. We have to form our consciences and then

try to vote for those candidates who will exercise their power and authority in the best interests of the common good, especially focusing on those who are the most vulnerable.

Ballots are on their way to our mailboxes as we speak. The US bishops' guide to forming faithful consciences is available in the breezeway and on the parish website. Pray with them. Pray with your ballots. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your conscience as you prepare to vote. On election day, November 5, after the Noon daily Mass we will have adoration here in the church until 8 pm which is the time ballots must be turned in. There is no political agenda behind this. We are simply entrusting our nation into the hands of Jesus. It would be a good idea to pray that prayer of healing for our nation that I gave out several weeks ago; a few of these are still available in the breezeway.

For various reasons, not all of us can vote. Regardless of that, we all still have some level of power, authority, and influence. I will use an example of this which you may not have considered before. Many of us have social media accounts which allow us to share information and stories to wide groups of people. That gives us a certain level of power and influence. Do we use that power wisely and responsibly? For example, when sharing a post, do you know its source or accuracy? False, inaccurate, and inflammatory social media posts have gone viral and done great damage to different groups of people. Irresponsibly sharing false, misleading, or conspiracy-theory types of posts is an abuse of the power and influence that comes along with signing up for a social media account and it can do great harm to innocent people.

How are you using whatever power, authority, or influence you have been given? Whether it is parish administration, voting, use of natural resources, or any other power and authority we have been entrusted with, all power and authority has its source in God. He has entrusted it to us according to our ability to handle it. Jesus is trusting us to administer that power and authority wisely and at the service of the common good. With great power comes great responsibility. The greater the power, the greater the responsibility. Jesus wants us to use that power wisely, responsibly, and with compassion.