

Feast of St. Matthew
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
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Let's consider what the word "politics" means. Not about what's going on in the world. But what a "polis" means – Aristotle said when two or more persons are together, even that is a polis.

What are the politics in your family; that is, how do you decide to use your group time and your finances? Any group of persons is a polis, and their policies are their politics.

So, this congregation is a Christian polis. By nature it has politics and needs to make sure they follow the Gospel.

*"As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called **Matthew sitting at the tax booth**; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him."*

Who was a tax collector? – one who collects taxes imposed by the enemies of the Jewish people, their oppressors.

So Matthew represents the disciples' oppressors

But Jesus' invites him to follow him. He joins.

Now how do you think the other Jewish disciples felt about this? There is politics here?

The majority would prefer Matthew wasn't there. He represented much of what they despised. And yet...

Once again, Jesus forces them to think bigger, more widely. Even the marginalized and despised are welcomed into the community of Jesus. Jesus'

policies on membership, his politics, have no boundaries. Even Aristotle would have found this unworkable –for a polis is based on fundamental consensus of its members.

But Jesus is full of surprises that always point to a better way to live. He does not want us to live on our terms, whether Democrat or Republican, rich or poor, educated or uneducated, healthy or sick and on and on.

In Christ's vision we all are somehow going to fit. But because of our own limited politics we tend to draw lines to keep some people out.

For your pastor and your congregation council the politics of this parish within the politics of Wicker Park is not always easy. Pray for them and support them.

Jesus sat at dinner in the house, with many tax collectors and sinners and his disciples.... The Pharisees said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

It's easy to see the politics of this text and especially the complaint of the most popular Jewish religion of the times.

For Jesus, his actions reflect his vision of God –there are to be no barriers in the kingdom of God.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, have a purity vision and purity politics. Tax collectors were impure because they served the national God of the Romans. Anyone who did not measure up to their way of doing religion, in liturgical style, in occupation, in social standing –and above all, in how they were judged morally pure, was to be shunned to protect the purity of the community.

See how ones' values informs your church politics? Now let's look at

Jesus' values and politics:

The purity code Jesus follows is yet to be revealed –but it brings a real equality to all. All are welcome at his table. They didn't have to be disciples either. Although hanging around they might become disciples.

Over 300 years later, when the Church was full of slaves and masters now worshipping at the same pews and same table, Bishop Gregory of Nyssa came to the now obvious conclusion that slavery had to be eliminated and that all were equal.

Now the massive economy of the ancient world, like that of the South, depended deeply on slave labor. Even though Gregory's political truth was rarely embraced, eventually the Civil War and living faith in Jesus began the emancipation of slavery all over the world. It's not over with radical religious sects.

Jesus' humane vision of the kingdom of God was a political threat to the Roman Empire, to the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and so he was, in effect, assassinated.

In the language of our times Jesus' assassination humiliated his disciples. Their hero was dead. But so also were their gods of selfish ambition, power hunger, greed and all the rest of our little petty but destructive gods, were dead.

Jesus' disciples were atheists for a couple of days, because following Jesus had exposed them to the foolishness of god-seeking. But in the midst of that atheism there arose a paradox: while there were no true gods at all –all they had left was the humanity in the life and teachings of Jesus.

And as they started to dare to live as he lived and taught, they saw that, paradoxically, the true godliness was simply to live like Jesus. As usual, Jesus is a kind of mirror. When we look at him, we see ourselves as we truly are in

the flesh and what he truly invites us to become.

So, in their atheism, Jesus' humility, humanity and suffering, Jesus' same Spirit showed them the way to live. The no god, Jesus, is truly God in his ordinary flesh and bones humanity. So revealed by the Spirit, the disciples saw this resurrected Jesus in all kinds of human situations. The disciples began proclaiming that Jesus was God –and that meant learning to live and love according to his life and teachings.

Baptized in Jesus, we live in that same Spirit of Jesus whose divinity is revealed in his utter humanity. We're all like Matthew. He invites us, we follow, we dine with him at his table. Amen