

Years ago, Ann Landers printed a letter in her column from a reader in Missouri. This person was alarmed at the growing number of people in the United States who were not exercising their right to vote. Their excuse: My vote won't matter anyway so why bother? This can be a very dangerous road to walk because if too many people become apathetic our society is doomed.

This letter went on to quote from an article in an election manual. The article was titled "How important is one vote?" Here are a few examples of how important one vote has been in history.

If it had been for one vote in 1776, our official language in the United States would have been German instead of English.

If it had not been for one vote in 1845, the state of Texas would not have become a part of the United States.

So you see, one person's exercise of the right to vote can make a difference, a tremendous difference.

What has been true in the United States has also been true for other countries as well.

In 1645, one vote gave Oliver Cromwell control of all England.

In 1649, one vote caused King Charles I of England to be executed.

One vote changed the entire nation of France from a monarchy to a republic in 1875

And in 1933, Adolf Hitler became the leader of the Nazi party in Germany.

Think of it, had it not been for one vote, millions of Jews may not have been slaughtered in the Holocaust. If it had not been for one vote, World War II with all of its pain and destruction may never have taken place. One vote can literally change the world.

So in the gospel today, Jesus makes it clear that we possess a dual citizenship: we are citizens of the earth and we are citizens of heaven. This dual citizenship means we have responsibilities to both God and Government.

Referring to this responsibility Peter in his first letter says to Christians, “Have reverence for God and respect for the Emperor.” And Paul in his letter to the Romans writes, “Be subordinate to the higher authorities.. Pay to all their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due; respect for whom respect is due.”

This leads to an important question: what happens if our dual citizenship leads to a conflict between God and country? Certainly it has happened to Christians throughout history. It happened in Roman times when thousands of Christians accepted death rather than worship the emperor. It happened in the 17th century when thousands of European Christians fled to America to practice their faith.

And it still goes on today with conflicts like abortion rights and the definition of a marriage.

Consider the case of Franz Jaeggerstatter, an Austrian peasant and father of three children. He opposed Hitler in the 1930's and when Hitler marched into Austria and held a mock vote of the people to show their support, Franz was the only one in his village who opposed Hitler. When war broke out in 1939, Franz refused to serve in Hitler's army. Finally on August 2, 1943, Franz was arrested and executed by the military. Franz had two obligations one to his God and one to his country, but when they conflicted in his own conscience he remained faithful to God.

Jesus reminds us of our dual obligations and the responsibilities that come with each one.

I close with this prayer which Thomas Jefferson offered for our nation:

Almighty God, you have given us this good land as our heritage. Bless our land, save us from violence, and from every evil way. Defend our liberties. Endow with the Spirit of wisdom those to whom in your name we entrust the authority of government. In our time of prosperity fill our hearts with thankfulness, and in the day of trouble do not allow our trust in you to fail.”