

Dear Members of St. Mary's,

I am writing this before I leave for a vacation...after the Feast of the Baptism of Jesus...and with my mind still reeling after the events in Washington DC and various reactions to it, and as we approached the inauguration of a new president. Jesus' baptism was the first among many profound acts of humility in his public life and ministry, a deep moment of teaching us all how to live together without the trappings of power and privilege and domination. Yet today at the Jordan River on the Jordanian side, where archeology is finding early evidence that this could very well be the baptismal site of Jesus, there's something of a *Cathedral contest* playing out among Christians: whose church building can be biggest and most expensive and most dramatic? Jesus' baptism – which he never needed in the first place since he is the author of baptism – was intended to tell us that **life isn't all about me and us and our institutions**. And some 2,000 years later, we're still trying to figure that out. We keep missing the point of it all. **To follow Jesus is about self-giving for the sake of the most vulnerable others around us. It's what he did for us.**

To admit this is not meant to be an exercise in self-loathing or of beating ourselves up needlessly. But it is meant to expose our constant temptation to pride, and to making even religion into something that is merely self-serving. That's not necessarily our fault; it just is. But *when we choose to ignore that, it is then that it becomes our fault.*

Among the flag bearers that stormed into our Nation's Capital with deadly force was at least one whose banner proclaimed, "**Jesus Saves.**" This is what at least some of us are capable of when we turn the Scriptures into a proclamation of "what I want." Thankfully, most Christians are not that unhinged – but it would be very unwise for any of us to completely ignore that temptation to install *personal preferences or political platforms* into the place where only God belongs.

Here's what the Prophet Isaiah said: "*My chosen one, with whom I am pleased and upon whom I have put my spirit, will bring forth justice to the Nations, not crying out, not shouting, not making his voice heard in the street.*"

So whenever we hear of threats and violence and alleged justice brought about by bloodshed or physical harm that is dressed up in the veneer of Jesus or Christian faith, let us **call that out for the sin that it is** – the utter warping of the gospel, and the betrayal of Jesus that it is. We don't need to go into combat about that, but we can acknowledge the lie that it presents, and **we can choose to live in a different way**. In fact, Isaiah said exactly that: "*I the Lord have called you for the victory of justice, I have grasped you by the hand, I formed you, and set you as...a light for the Nations.*"

Wherever there are people or angry mobs who shout out something otherwise, **it is our Christian responsibility to witness to a better way, to God's truth**. This time in our country is exactly such a time. Jesus is *not* and *has never been* about domination. Jesus is about a witness to peace. Our country was founded as a haven for those who escaped oppression. A democracy was formed and a rule of law was established. Let us use the democratic system to bring about real peace and real justice. As we begin to listen to each other, we will find that, in the end, we all need and want the same things—the way to get there may vary. Here is where we need to compromise and meet.

Fr Steve