

PRESIDENT GEORGE H.W. BUSH: REMEMBERING A PATRIOTIC GENTLEMAN

Even as a brand-new deacon thirty years ago, I quickly learned that it could be tricky if I were perceived to be opining on politics. Thankfully, I was ordained **eleven days after** the 1988 Presidential election and was never in the position to preach prior to a presidential election until 1992. Clearly, speaking about moral issues from the pulpit is not only a right, but I would characterize it as a duty— but not surprisingly, people infer at times that what we say from the pulpit is intended as partisan politics. In truth, I have assiduously tried to dispel this false perception for the better part of three decades. As it turned out, the 1988 election of **George H.W. Bush** to the presidency was not particularly close— Bush won by 7 million votes, but lost Minnesota by 6 percentage points. It was an electoral college landslide of 426-111. I suspect part of the reason for the lopsided victory was his outstanding resume and compelling personal service. It certainly helped that the country had emerged much stronger following the two-term presidency of Ronald Reagan.

By any metric, George H.W. Bush had **impeccable preparation** for holding the nation's highest office: U.S. Congressman, U.S. Representative in China, CIA Director, and two terms as Vice-President. But it is his demeanor that strikes me today as all too rare. No, I am not claiming that politics was “pure” thirty years ago, but the country did not seem to have the rancor that we have witnessed in the past decade. Bush won the majority of men (58%), women (51%), and won majorities in all four age groups. Of course, that all changed four years later, but I digress. He led his amazing life as a consummate gentleman every step of the way.

President Bush and my own father share the same birth year and month— just 18 days separate them. President Bush enlisted in the armed services at age 18. Here is a young man who it would appear could have easily gained an exemption. He was the son of a well-to-do investment banker, and a graduate of an elite prep school at Phillips Academy in Andover, MA. He served as a pilot on aircraft carriers in the Pacific, flying some **58 combat missions**, receiving the Distinguished Flying Cross. He was shot down by the Japanese, yet was rescued. It was that moment, when he pondered why his life was spared, that he considered public service to his country. He would turn out to be the last combat veteran to be elected to the nation's highest office.

Church blogger Rocco Palmo relates a wonderful story about the friendship that developed between then Vice-President Bush and the Papal Nuncio, **Archbishop Pio Laghi**. U.S. Vice presidents had no dedicated residence, when they began to reside on the grounds of the U.S. Naval Observatory in 1974. That just happens to be directly across the street from the Papal Nunciature, located on Massachusetts Ave. Laghi began his diplomatic service to the United States in December 1980, just a month after Bush's election. Palmo relates that Bush and Laghi became **tennis pals!** Don't waste your time— I failed to surface an image of them on the court, but I had heard of Archbishop Laghi's penchant for tennis. He sometimes volleyed with the seminarians at the North American College while later serving in Rome as the Prefect for Catholic Education.

You do not often see a Cardinal donning the tennis gear, but he did! He was initially called an Apostolic Delegate, the term used when a country does not yet have full diplomatic relations. Formal U.S. and Holy See diplomatic relations were established under President Reagan in 1984 (see photo), and Vice-President Bush had a front row seat to that development. Another memorable aspect during the presidency of George H.W. Bush was the fall of the **Berlin Wall**, coming just six months after my ordination. My whole life had been lived within the context of the Cold War. While I am not quite old enough to recall school drills to take shelter from the bombs, I certainly recall the images of the May Day Military Parades in Moscow, with its show of force. To see the Berlin Wall come down was the fruit of the hopes and dreams of millions of people and was facilitated by President Reagan, the Solidarity movement in Poland, Pope John Paul II, etc. and President Bush was able to follow that work with his own shrewd diplomacy with President Gorbachev of Russia.

Finally, I would be remiss in failing to mention the **Americans with Disabilities Act** that he signed into law in 1990. How many even think about life without handicapped parking spaces, automatic door openers in public buildings, etc. today? We all take it for granted, but that all came to fruition with President Bush's support. Unquestionably, President Bush was part of the “greatest generation,” a unique generation that “saw it all,” and lived through such troubled times, as well as incredible growth following World War II. They occupied a unique

place in the history of our nation, and we pause to entrust President Bush's soul to the loving arms of almighty God and thank him for his tremendous service to this nation.

- Feeling in the dark lately? Well, turns out you have good reasons. According to the U of M St. Paul Campus Climate Observatory, the three-month period from September-November was the **least sunny** in 35 years. Only 18 days in that three-month period were clear (and just two all of November). Twice as many days (40) were cloudy.
- For reasons still inexplicable today, as a kid I was ambivalent about **Pontius Pilate**. I felt sorry for him, believing him to be caught between the proverbial rock and a hard place with respect to adjudicating the case of Jesus. Archeologists deciphered Pilate's name on a 2000-year-old ring that had been discovered during the excavation of Herodium, an ancient fortress south of Bethlehem. Prefect of Judea from 26-36 A.D., Pilate was removed in disgrace following his execution of men without proper trial. Had I known that back then...
- As we approach the end of the calendar year, I wish to **encourage your charitable giving** to the parish. While I was grateful that Sunday stewardship increased slightly in 2017-18 from the previous year, other sources of income decreased (e.g. investment, estate income), and expenses were higher last year, due to some unplanned city assessments for Selby Ave., etc. Please see the notice on page 7 for more information on charitable giving. Thank you for your support!
- Better late than never. It only took seven years, but significant nonetheless, **EWTN** has **won its lawsuit** over the issue of the Health and Human Services (HHS) contraceptive mandate. The mandate had stated that employer-provided health insurance plans were required to cover certain "preventative services," a euphemism for contraception, including abortifacients and sterilization procedures.
- Next weekend, we will take up our **Christmas Flower Offering** to help defray costs associated with preparing our Church. You are invited to write the names of those for whom you wish to pray (in loving memory or in honor of) on the special envelopes in the pews and return them next weekend. Thank you for your support.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel
Rector