

A prayer during the week of a resigning / not resigning president

Living God – we pray to you today knowing that you can relate to our concerns, for you too were repeatedly disappointed in the leaders you chose.

We remember, you preferred a flat structure of governance – but the people, envious of their neighbours who seemed to achieve more with a king – demanded that you give them a king. You knew that it was unwise that people place all their faith in a single human being and you knew how dangerous it would be for that single human being to be given so much power, so you said “No”.

Instead you invited people to use their imaginations to share power collectively by listening to every voice, especially the crying voice for justice as well as the still soft voice of mercy. But this seemed too slow and difficult, not to mention inefficient and unproductive – so the people insisted: “Give us a king like other nations!” When you saw how stubbornly adamant they were, you graciously decided to at least make the best of a bad decision by helping them to choose a king.

You did not look at the person’s looks. You did not take their age into consideration nor their position of popularity on some phony organisational list. Instead you looked at their heart. A heart after your own heart. A heart yearning for justice and mercy. And yet each and every king that earned your vote ended up a disappointment. During their term in office they were corrupted. Power went to their head. Wealth went to their wallet. Unchecked desire went to their groin. Soon they became part of the problem that they were anointed to address:

Instead of bringing peace they were embroiled in constant conflict....defending themselves rather than the people.

Instead of listening to the cries of the needy they held audience with the well-to-do who paid ridiculous amounts for a seat at their banquet table.

Instead of upholding the courts of justice, they made a mockery of the law.

Instead of housing the un-housed they extended their own mansions.

Instead of taking special care of the vulnerable they pandered to the strong.

Instead of good news for the poor they laughed with the rich.

Instead of safeguarding the truth their spokespersons spun yarns that were chopped up into sound bites for what we call: The News.

Instead of clothing the naked they collected designer suits and shiny shoes.

Instead of maintaining life-giving services they spent the maintenance budget on handbags and hotels.

And even as we acknowledge our anger and disappointment in our leaders and the imperfect systems that bring them into positions of power, protect us from being cynical about leadership *per se*. Lead us away from the temptation to disengage. Remind us that leaders and leadership matters. Forgive our foolishness for making saviours out of some leaders and devils out of others. Save us from placing all leaders on a simplistic scale of moral equivalence. That some leaders lean more towards what is just than others – and even a degree of difference in this regard is worth struggling for. Give our leaders your sense of justice we pray and give us the energy to hold them accountable to it.

And now even as we pray for just and merciful leaders to heal our broken and beloved land, we recognise that we are in varying positions of leadership ourselves. In positions of influence and power within our work, our community, our church, our family... May we not shirk our responsibility by denying the power we do have. Help us to place whatever power we have in the service of others. To build others up. To set others free. To affirm and encourage and heal. And above all to transform the systems that belittle, discourage and harm – for the sake of justice and mercy.

Amen

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