

## Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> (A) 10/22/2023

A father was trying to teach his fifth-grade son the value of tithes and offerings. The boy listened attentively, and then he went on to say, "I still don't understand why you have to pay taxes." To this the father replied, "Because the Bible says we must give unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar and unto God what belongs to God." His son looked puzzled. "That's what I'm trying to tell you, Dad. Caesar died a long time ago."

In today's readings it speaks of the nature of our obligations to God and to our country; by birth we become the citizens of the country, and by baptism we become the citizens of heaven. As Christians, we are to obey the government, even when it is pagan and non-Christian.

The prophet Isaiah declares that Cyrus, even though a pagan, was God's instrument. The amazing fact is that God actually used Cyrus to restore His people to their homeland. God is able and willing to use ungodly powers to achieve His ends because He is the God not only of the Jews, but of history and of the whole world. Hence, He anointed Cyrus as a savior of His people. Cyrus carried out God's plan by setting the Jewish exiles free and giving them permission to go back to Judah to rebuild their Temple and city. He also returned to them the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple. So, a pagan emperor became, in God's hand, the instrument by means of whom the people of Israel might return to their Promised Land.

In the gospel we see how Jesus makes the people realize of their responsibility. Pharisees asked Jesus, is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not? The question which the Pharisees asked Jesus was intended to create a very real dilemma for him. If he said that it was unlawful to pay the tax, the Herodians and their allies would report him to the Roman officials, who would then arrest him as a revolutionary. If he said that it was lawful to pay the tax, the insurgents and their supporters would turn against him and he would be discredited in the eyes of the people who were against paying taxes to a pagan emperor.

Here we need to remember and learn from Jesus. Jesus did not give the answer for their question directly but he asked them a question, "Whose image (*eikon* in Greek) and inscription are these?" They replied Caesar's. Jesus then said, "*Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar -- and to God what belongs to God*" In other words,

we give to the emperor the coin because his image is on it, and we give to God our own selves because we are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26). Jesus' answer acknowledges our obligation as citizens to the state, but affirms our larger obligation to God. Both the state and God require certain loyalties from us, but we owe God our very lives.

A loyal Christian is always a loyal citizen. Failure in good citizenship is also failure in Christian duty. We fulfill our duties to our country by loyally obeying the just laws of the State, by paying all lawful taxes, and by contributing our share, whenever called on, toward the common good.

As the famous martyr, St Thomas More said of himself: *"The King's good servant, but God's first."* Cooperation with secular authority cannot interfere with our primary duty of "giving back to God" our whole selves, in whose image, like the stamp on the coin, we are made. Consequently, we give taxes to the government but we give ourselves to God.

It is the duty of Christians to pay for the services and the privileges that government provides, like paved roads, police and fire departments, banks, schools and other necessities. If we refuse to pay taxes, how will these needs be fulfilled? We must submit to the civil authorities and respect the laws of our country in order to live in peace. As loyal citizens we must also see to it that our elected representatives are faithful in maintaining law and order in the country and in promoting the welfare of its citizens without violating God's laws. Our contribution to the parish church should be an expression of our gratitude to God, giving back to God all that he has given us. Active participation in the various ministries of the parish by offering our time and talents is yet another way of giving to God his due, our whole self.

Jesus followed the law of the government and lived according to will of God. The same Jesus is coming amidst us in the form of Body and Blood. Let us ask Jesus to give us grace to obey the law and to offer ourselves to him.