

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

By: Fr. Chris

Have you ever noticed that the teachings of Jesus often leave us with more questions than answers? The religious officials ask Jesus whether it is legal to pay the tax to the emperor. They think that a yes answer will discredit him with the people who hate Rome's domination of Israel. If he says no, they figure they can tell the political authorities that Jesus is advocating rebellion. It seems very simple.

Jesus responds by asking a simple question: Whose head is on the coin? It is Caesar's, of course. Well then, if it belongs to Caesar, give it back to him. But, Jesus is quick to add, give to God what belongs to God. Now the dilemma is in the Pharisee's court. What belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God? How do you know?

Jesus did not answer that question. Every age has had to ask that same question and try to determine how to answer it. During the time of the persecutions in the first few centuries giving to God meant risking persecution and maybe death. Later, giving to Caesar during the Middle Ages meant giving loyal allegiance to your king or prince. He kept you safe from the barbarians and warring bandits. During war most people knew that giving to Caesar meant fighting for your country. But should one give to Caesar if the king or leader is corrupt? What if the political system itself is corrupt? Can one truly divide their loyalties to God and king? That has been the question Christians have had to ask who lived in Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia, Cuba, and other communist and fascist nations.

There are two questions that have to be asked. The first one is what belongs to Caesar? In other words, what do we owe to the state and to civil rulers? In a society that is benign or supportive to our faith we are required to be good citizens. We should support the efforts of the state to provide roads, schools, and police for public safety and well-being. It is necessary to have a military to defend the country. In times of national emergency it would be necessary to join the military for national defense. These things can only happen by the state raising money through taxation and fees. It is necessary to pay just taxes for these enterprises. Likewise, it is not lawful or moral to incite riots, do violence, or commit arson to get our way.

In those states that are hostile to religion or are hostile to basic human rights and dignity the Christian has a moral obligation to care for and support life. If the nation does not uphold life and protect it then it is moral to disobey the state. It was right for citizens of Nazi Germany to sabotage their war

efforts so that justice and human rights could be restored to the German people. In our nation it is good for people to organize town meetings, marches, and civil disobedience, short of violence, when the rights of people are not protected. That happened in the civil rights marches of the 50's and 60's. Today we do this to secure the rights of the unborn. Yet, even in those cases it is not right to harm life or cause murder or mayhem to change laws. That is not acceptable. We always look to the cross and realize that evil can only be toppled with goodness, not more evil.

What do we owe God? That is more difficult for God has given us everything. We realize that God has given us life. He has given us our family. Love, friendship, and kindness are gifts from God. Therefore, it is necessary that we preserve life and family. That means we should not abuse food, alcohol or drugs. It means that we should not destroy our family through violence. It means in marriage couples should strive to work through problems rather than seek divorce.

God gave us all of creation. We have been entrusted with the natural world. We are to protect the environment from pollution and needless waste. We should look for opportunities to recycle and reuse rather than to discard things. That is very difficult in our society of plenty. It's often more cost effective to buy something new than to have it fixed. That makes it very difficult to justify the expense. But if we are seriously trying to give to God what is His, then we have to care for the natural resources of the planet.

God also has given us time. That is probably our most precious gift. Since none of us knows how much time we have we should use it well. Giving time to God is so critical. We need time for worship. An hour a week is not a lot. But hopefully we also spend time each day in prayer. This is very necessary too. Then our time is needed in ministry and service. We are never done with God's work. Yet, all he asks is for just a bit of time back from the 24 hours we get every day. So, look to give back to God time in ministry, prayer, and worship.

See I told you this is trickier than it first looks. Jesus always gets us to see things in a new way. So, be good citizens of the earth, but more importantly, be citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Amen.

READINGS OF THE WEEK

Isaiah 45:1-6

1 Thessalonians 1:1-5

Matthew 22:15-21

October 19, 2014

靈 修 生 活

宗 教 與 政 治

張 春 申 神 父

為了解釋今天福音，我們必須說明一下耶穌時代的背景。那時羅馬帝國統治地中海沿岸所有的土地，耶穌所居的巴勒斯坦，也是羅馬皇帝的領土，當然要求猶太人向羅馬納稅。福音中的稅吏便是擔任收稅的角色。由於猶太人自認為天主的子民，不是人間帝王的子民，因此對於納稅這件事，即使事實上是忍受奇恥大辱，可是道理上是絕不妥協地抗拒。也是在這種情況下，法利塞人、黑落德黨人聯合起來去試探耶穌。「納稅給凱撒（即羅馬皇帝），可以不可以？」這是一個非常惡毒的問題。假使回答：「可以」，那麼自認為天主子民的猶太人，一定會說耶穌不愛祖國，甚至會說他在賣國，再也不去聽他了。假使回答：「不可以」，那麼說不定那些與耶穌作對的人會向羅馬總督那裡去告發耶穌，以叛亂的罪名處罰他。可是耶穌看清他們的詭計，以一個稅幣的肖像打發他們走了。

不過耶穌在這個機會上說的一句話：「凱撒的，就應歸還凱撒，天主的，就應歸還天主」為後代教會實在是一個生活指南，值得在今天教會慶祝傳教節時再提出來討論。這句話有許多不同的解釋，不過最為普遍的一種解釋是指國家政治與宗教信仰的各自獨立，凱撒代表國家政治；天主表示宗教信仰。國家政治在政府運籌下，為了人民的安全、生活富裕、塵世物質以及精神各方面的發展而工作。至於宗教信仰是人類天賦的權利，或者個人或者團體，實踐敬奉天主的道德與精神生活，不只是謀求永恆生命，也是在國家與社會中發生化育功能。國家與宗教兩者之間各自具有活動的領域。信仰自由既是天賦人權，國家政府自當積極加以尊重，不得干涉與限制，這是所謂「天主的，就應歸還天主」。當然如果宗教界有些不法之徒假宗教之名破壞人民福利，國家始可依法干涉。另一方面，國家政府既有職責為國家謀求福利，宗教信仰自當服從法律，這也是聖經的教訓。伯多祿說：『你們要為主的緣故，服從人立的一切制度；或者服從帝王為最高元首，或者服從帝王派遣來懲罰作惡者，獎賞行善者的練督……，』這便是所謂：「凱撒的，就應歸還凱撒」。但若國家政府的命令相反天主，侵犯宗教信仰的權利，那麼宗教當然不能相反天主而去服從。所以，宗徒大事錄中，當猶太權威禁止伯多祿和若望宣揚耶穌的福音時，他們回答說：『聽從你們而不聽從天主，在天主前是否合理，你們評斷罷！因為我們不得不說我們所見所聞的事』。

事實上，在天主教會歷史中，教難的發生，都是為了肯定「天主的，就應歸還天主」，許多殉道者不懼流血致命，就是要服從天主的命令，保衛自己的宗教信仰，以及宣揚福音的權利。今天教會慶祝傳教節，這是耶穌基督的命令：往訓萬民。我們祈求天主使天國喜訊傳遍各地，我們也祈求天主，使有些傳教不能自由的地區，早日阻礙消失。原來福音雖然是引導人認識天主，謀求永生，但是也為勸導人群，彼此相愛，為國家與社會謀求福利。國家政府實在沒有理由要去阻止傳教。

摘自「妙音送長風」

本 週 讀 經

二 零 一 四 年 十 月 十 九 日

依 45:1-6; 得前:1:1-5; 瑪 22:15-21