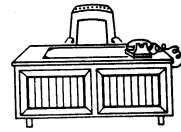


29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 18, 2020



From the Desk of
Fr. Romanus

Dear Parishioners,

Sunday Reflection:

In this Sunday's gospel, we find Jesus uttering one of the most famous phrases in Scripture – "Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God." This statement is generally interpreted as summarizing the relationship between Christianity and secular authorities.

The Pharisees and Herodians came to Jesus as part of a plot to entrap him. They knew that the tax paid to the Roman authorities was unpopular among Jews, and that Jesus had no fear of secular authorities. Part of the plot was to set the stage with flattery, hoping that Jesus falls for it. They said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are a truthful man and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. And you are not concerned with anyone's opinion, for you do not regard a person's status. Tell us, then, what is your opinion: Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?"

His questioners expected a "yes" or "no" answer from Jesus. A "yes" answer would lead to the accusation that he was opposed to the Jewish resistance to Roman occupation and exploitation. Part of the argument was that Roman taxation was undermining their contribution of tithes to the temple. Hence, Jesus' support of Roman taxation would inflame public anger and might even lead to his execution. On the other hand, a "no" answer would give them reason to report him to the Roman authorities for inciting a rebellion. This would give them reason to make a scapegoat of him. They thought he was cornered with no way out. One could only imagine their amazement when Jesus stated, "Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."

By his statement, Jesus refused to embrace the dichotomy between Church and State inherent in the question. One's obligations to the Church do not eliminate obligations to the State. By the same token, one's obligations to the State do not eliminate obligations to the Church. Those who benefit from societal programs should not excuse themselves from supporting those programs on the basis of religious obligations. Being a Christian is not an excuse for not paying taxes and living in accord with societal laws. People of faith ought to abide by the laws of society and honor secular authorities since every authority comes from God. However, they ought to work mightily to overturn bad laws and policies. For example, laws that fail to respect human life and dignity.

Tertullian, an early church writer interprets Jesus' response to mean that you give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, that is, material wealth (money), and to God what belongs to God, that is, yourself who bears the image of God. The creation account in Genesis states that God created humans in his own image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). As people of faith, we are obliged to give ourselves to God at all times, and not to Caesar. Unfortunately, some have given themselves totally to Caesar, that is, to money and materialism, with little or no time for God or religion. It may explain why some Catholics do not go to Mass or get involved in parish life and ministries.

Giving to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God is not intended to suggest that there is an area of creation beyond God's control since God even created Caesar. What it does suggest is that there is an area of responsibility delegated to civil authorities for the good of society. Even Caesar is accountable to God.

Have a great week!

Fr. Romanus