

Homily for October 18, 2020

We have a three-year cycle of Sunday readings. The Presidential elections occur every four years. That means once every twelve years we get the readings for today when they seem to have been written for what is on everyone's minds.

In terms of our First Reading today, from Isaiah; which one of those people running for the highest office in the land get to be considered an Emperor Cyrus of Persia? Do we get to proclaim our favorite as God's **anointed?** Or do we end up gritting our teeth if the other guy wins and emphasizing the line, "It is I who arm you, though you know me not..."

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Of course, in the centuries of Faith that are recorded in the Bible, there is a complicated love-hate relationship with all the foreign powers who compete with Israel. Some are seen as doing God's work of disciplining His people. At other times, the nation turns to God to save them from their enemies, like in Sirach, chapter thirty-six, where the prayer to God is, "As you have used us to show them your holiness, so now use them to show us your glory." [Verses 4-5]

Today, the passage is in the context of Cyrus, having conquered Babylon, deciding to free the Israelites, and even financing the rebuilding of the temple.

Note that the main message is always that the One Real Ruler - is God. God must be ruler of our hearts, our lives, and our societies.

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This is Christ's message in the gospel today. Here is how one scholar sums up the trap Our Lord is being put into:

"...Herod and his supporters presumably supported the payment of the census tax since they ruled under the auspices, and by the favor, of the Roman Empire. The Pharisees certainly managed to move about freely in Roman circles, and so they at least cooperated with Roman laws and tax requirements. Thus, it would appear that neither the Herodians nor the Pharisees were really opponents of the tax. As more people began to follow Jesus, the Pharisees and the Herodians were attempting to diminish our Lord's influence and power."

"If Jesus were to say that He opposed the tax, then the Pharisees and Herodians could turn Him in to the Roman authorities...If Jesus were to openly support the tax, then those followers who were looking for an earthly messiah to overthrow the Romans would mostly likely be disappointed and refuse to follow Him any longer. That is the dilemma of this question, and it is a direct threat to our Lord's mission."

"Disciples sometimes find themselves in the midst of a dilemma as well. Such situations can occur in marriages, families, friendships, and professional worlds. The Church today continues to face a variety of dilemmas in regards to certain questions. This is especially true when those who wish to diminish the mission and effectiveness of the Church seek ways in which to dissuade disciples, damage the credibility of Christianity, or impede the ability of the Church to function freely and readily."

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Christ returned the focus back to God as their ruler. The coin bore the image of Caesar. Jesus says the famous phrase, "Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."

I know I am repeating myself, but this ties in well with the definition of Religion. All too often, people speak of religion as if it is only a creation of humans. But God gets to say how we should interact with Him.

A basic definition to remember on Religion goes well with Christ's words today.

Religion is the Virtue of Justice, where we give to God what belongs to God.

Justice is giving to others what we owe them - including respect. Religion is the giving to God what we owe God. And what do we owe God?

Our Lord asked whose image is on the coin. This reminds us of the first chapters in the bible. We have been made in God's image and likeness. So to repay God, that means we have to give God ourselves - every part of us.

Some people leave the Church because they don't want to open up all their life to Christ. Even though that is the only way to truly be happy and determine what is right to do.

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Religion and Politics. Do we let our politics become the glasses through which we see our religion? Or do we let our religion be the glasses through which we live our politics? The election landscape would look much different if Christians - made in the image and likeness of God - worked to give to God what belongs to God even in their political parties.

One bishop ended a reflection on this gospel with these questions we can ask ourselves:

"How does God collect His tax from you in regards to your time, talent, and treasure?"

"What other analogies can you draw from the experience of paying taxes and discipleship?"

"Caesar had a right to receive tax from those who participated in the Roman Empire. When in your relationship with God do you acknowledge that the Lord has a right to your life?"

"The so-called "head tax" of the Roman Empire amounted to a flat rate of one Denarius per person and was paid by everyone regardless of economic status. What is the most basic tax that God can expect of every disciple, no matter who they are?"