

Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time - October 18, 2020

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It is said ... that politics makes strange bedfellows and ... that ... the enemy of my enemy is my friend. Both of these sayings describe the situation Our Lord's enemies find themselves in. ... The Herodians were supporters of the Idumean puppet king, Herod Antipas. Idumeans **were** descendants of Abraham and Isaac ... but through Esau. They were **not** of Israel ... so they were despised by the Jews as foreigners. Herod ... supervised by a Roman governor ... ruled by the grace of Tiberius Caesar ... and... **Tiberius** ... had been declared by the Roman Senate ... to be a god! So ... paying ... this census tax to Caesar ... in the eyes of the Pharisees ... was nothing short of idolatry. Besides ... the very coin itself contained the forbidden ... graven image. Even though Herodians and Pharisees despised each other ... they plotted and connived together to entrap Jesus. Such was their fear of the Prince of Peace. They ask him a question. His answer will surely allow the Herodians to denounce him to Herod for treason ... or ... it will allow the Pharisees to denounce Him to the Sanhedrin ... for condoning idolatry. ... Of course Jesus is not about to be tripped up by this ... or any other of their plots ... and His answer ... gives voice to the dilemma that has plagued people of good will from ancient times to the present. What is our duty to Caesar ... the state ... the government? And what is our duty to God?

Of course ... in a **perfect** world there is no conflict. Witness our first reading where even the Persian Great King ... Cyrus ... a pagan ... cooperates with God's will ... even to the extent ... according to Isaiah ... that God calls him his **anointed**... rare **indeed** ... if not unique ... in salvation history! But of course ... we do **not** live in a perfect world so the question remains. What do we owe to Caesar ...? And what do we owe to God?

We are citizens of earthly governments ... and we are citizens of the Kingdom of God. We have duties and obligations to both. Many man-made laws ... hopefully most laws ... are enacted for the common good and we have a moral as well as legal obligation to obey them. ... There is certainly nothing inherently evil about driving on the left hand side of the road ... but it **becomes** evil when the rest of society agrees to drive on the right hand side of the road ... because this uniformity helps maintain safety and protects life ... and non-compliance ... threatens and endangers. ... Governments tax ... and as much as we hate the idea of taxes ... there are protections or services that cannot be provided without them. And they cost! And whereas ... we are free to debate what services Government **should** provide ... and ... to periodically vote ... accordingly ... when all has been decided ... we are morally obligated to pay our taxes ... and to cheat on them ... breaks God's commandments like any other theft. Not repaying to Caesar equates ... to not repaying to God! But even though man-made laws

may very well increase our obligation to God ... we must understand that ... the **reverse** is never true! The Government's loosening of rules and regulations ... its permissiveness ... can never lessen our obligation to God.

We are midway through October ... Respect Life Month ... and I can think of nothing that belongs to God ... more than human life! And when man-made statutes ... or court rulings ... are passed that deny the protection of law and abandon many members of society ... never doubt that they are still embraced by God's law of love and under the protection of His commandments. We are obliged to obey God's Law ... even when governments no longer support that law.

But sometimes ... Governments not only enact laws that fail to work in harmony with God's law ... they ... try to force us to choose Caesar over God ... While preparing this homily I came across this story. I would like to share it with you ... sadly ... just one of many that came out of WWII.

A Polish public health nurse was forced into service ... working in a Jewish ghetto in her city. She soon discovered the sick ... instead of being taken to hospitals ... were actually being killed by the SS. A devout, practicing Catholic, she had to make a choice! She could obey the Nuremburg Laws, or obey God's law. She chose to rescue Jewish children by smuggling them out of the ghetto and placing them in homes of trusted family. She sought help from her parish priest, asking that he give her signed baptismal certificates in order protect the children by making it appear they were Christian. He **refused** on the grounds that scripture forbade the violation of secular law. She continued without his support. She rescued about a dozen children before she was caught and executed. It should be noted that many, many **other** priests in similar circumstances did, provide fake baptismal certificates ... and saved many lives.