

RENDER TO GOD AND TO CAESAR (Mt 22:15-21)

A couple of friends of mine, Boudreaux and Thibodeaux, were sitting on the front porch contemplating the weightier matters of the universe. Boudreaux sez to Thibodeaux, "Tee, when duh end of duh worl' cum, ah want tuh be in Loosiana." Thibodeaux say back, "Oh, yeh? Why dat, Boo?" Boudreaux say, "Cuz evryting happen 20 years later here dan anywhere else." Being a native of Loosiana and a Cajun, I can attest to the truth of Boudreaux's statement. When the end comes, whether it is the end of the world or our own personal end, we may find ourselves asking for more days to get ourselves right with God, knowing that we fell short in so many ways of loving God and loving one another.

Today's gospel reading concerns where does God's authority end and where does the civil authority have jurisdiction? Of course, the question is posed to Jesus in a way meant to entrap him and to either get him on the wrong side of the Roman authorities or to alienate his Jewish followers. This question might be likened to someone asking me, "Have you stopped beating your wife yet?" The question makes assumptions which are not true; therefore there is no right answer to the question as posed.

The assumption which the question from the Pharisees and Herodians presupposes is that the Jewish people are not under the Roman law in their daily lives. But Jesus doesn't play their game. To their question of whether to pay taxes or not, Jesus answers to "render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" (Mt 22:21). End of game...except the question hangs in the air, "what exactly does this mean? What belongs to the state and what belongs to God?" Some might say that everything belongs to God. And while that is true, the Bible also says that we are subject to civil authority. Today's first reading shows us how God can use non-believers in authority to carry out His will. Cyrus, the king of Persia, sets the Jewish people, who have been in exile for many years, free to return to their homeland and to rebuild their cities and the temple.

Jesus' answer should not be taken to mean that God and Caesar are traveling along parallel paths, that God is God and secular society is secular society and never the two shall meet, but that they do, in fact, meet. Consider that, here we are, in this moment, sitting in this church, and the Almighty God who created us and who loves us is right here present with us. He is present in our gathering together as a worshipping community; he is present in the depths of your being and mine. And when we leave this church He will remain present to us. When we live

fully in this world recognizing God's presence in everything and everyone around us, then we can become sensitized to this.

But maybe we are like the person who went to their pastor and said to him, "I don't want the city to come into my church and I don't want my church to come into the city. I want to keep them separate, completely separate, so that once a week on Sunday I can walk away from the people out there and walk into the church, which is a world all by itself, untarnished by the sadness and cruelty of the world outside. I long for this; I wait for this all week."¹

But Jesus tells us in the Scriptures, that God is out there also, outside the walls of this building, that life in Him unfolds for us amongst the people and the circumstances in our neighborhood, our work, the city streets, our homes. That is where we truly find God. That is where we are called to join with others to make the kingdom of heaven real and present and alive to everyone. We are called to take the teachings we hear on Sunday, the spiritual food we receive from this mass, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit into the world outside and to build the kingdom of God.

In case you haven't heard in just a little over 2 weeks there is an election coming up which gives us the opportunity to bring the path of God and the path of Caesar together. We exercise our right to vote and participate in the political process. We speak the truth of God as we find it in scriptures and in the teachings of the church in the choices we make with our vote. The apostles --- Peter, James, John, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, and the others --- were sent out to spread the message of Jesus Christ to the world. Today's successors to those apostles --- John Steinbock, Roger Mahoney, Stephen Blair, George Neiderauer, Tod Brown and the rest of the bishops of California --- continue to make known to us how to live the message of Jesus Christ in our modern world. There are several initiatives which they have spoken out strongly on. These initiatives have far greater implications to life than merely our personal thoughts and feelings, and we owe it to our God to thoroughly search out the consequences of our votes. These initiatives are not about strictly secular matters; they reflect, to a certain degree, the way we live out the commandments of loving God and loving our neighbor.

We all know that the Bishops have spoken against abortion in all cases as destroying life which comes from God; thus, they support, and call for a "Yes" vote on, Proposition 4 which calls for the notification of parents before terminating the pregnancy of minors. Schools cannot administer **any** medication, including Tylenol or aspirin, to a minor without a parent's notification and approval, but the state wants to give the school permission to abort a baby without the consent or even notification of the

parents of the minor child. Which is more harmful to the physical, mental, psychological and spiritual health of a 12 or 13 year old girl, to give her two Tylenol or to kill a living baby who is growing within her body?

And we all know that the Bishops of our state support Proposition 8, calling for us to vote “Yes” on defining marriage as being only between one man and one woman. From the beginning of time, God ordained that the union of a man and a woman to be the foundation of human society; we are called to affirm God’s plan for our world in this state.

The Bishops are **opposed** to, and call for us to vote “No” on, Proposition 6 for restorative justice reasons. The teachings of Jesus and the Church are clear in believing in the sacredness of **every** human life and that each individual, no matter how poor or insignificant or sinful, is worthy of redemption. The Church teaches that our prison system should be designed to rehabilitate and restore the individuals who are in jail to functioning members of our society. This honors the dignity and sanctity of each human life.

“Render to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s (Mt 22:21).” Our world is a passing thing, as are each and every one of us, but our destiny and the destiny of this world is entering the kingdom of God. Let us build that kingdom with our lives here and now, so that when the end does come we won’t have to wish that we lived in Loosiana.

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¹ **Sermon Warehouse** by Voicings Publications