

October 22 XXIX Sunday in Ordinary Time

The common theme of today's readings is the nature of our obligations to God and to our country. The readings show us how, with God's help, we can be ideal citizens of both earth and Heaven.

In the first reading and in the Gospel, a world superpower is matched up against the Kingdom of God. Isaiah the prophet foretells how, not by Cyrus' conscious intention, his policies as Persian Emperor, will become part of God's saving plan for His chosen people. The words of the Responsorial Psalm, (Ps 96) "Say among the nations: The Lord is King," summon all Israel, all the nations and all creation to acknowledge and praise God as King of the universe. The Psalm reminds us that when people put God's Kingdom first, everyone benefits.

In the second reading, referring to Jesus as "our Lord Jesus Christ," Paul acknowledges Jesus as One who shares Divine power with God the Father. Paul reminds his Thessalonians that it was God Who chose them to live in Him and gave them the power to produce the "work of Faith ... labor of Love and endurance of Hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, before God our Father." It is for this reason that Paul praises his converts in Thessalonica, assuring them, "We give thanks to God always for all of you, remembering you in our prayers."

In the Gospel, Jesus escapes from the trap in the question, "Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?" by stating, "Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God." By this answer, Jesus reminds His questioners that if they are that concerned and careful about paying taxes to the state, they should be much more concerned and careful about their service to God and their obligations to Him as their Creator and Lord.

1) We need to "give to Caesar what is Caesar's": How? Like it or not, it's a reality that our ancestors created the kind of government that relies on a portion of its citizens' income to function. Hence, it is the duty of Christians to pay for the services and the privileges that government provides — like paved roads, police and fire departments, banks, schools, and other necessities. If we refuse to pay taxes, how will these needs be fulfilled? Another way of "giving to Caesar what is Caesar's" is to participate actively in the running of the government, electing the most suitable candidates, and influencing them through frequent contacts. Third, we must submit to the civil authorities and respect the laws of our country in

order to live in peace. As loyal citizens, we must also see to it that our elected representatives are faithful in maintaining law and order in the country and in promoting the welfare of its citizens. But we need to keep in mind that we must give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and not the things that are God's. We must "obey God rather than human beings."

2) We need to "give to God what is God's": How? Since everything is God's, we must give ourselves to Him 100%, not just 10% on Sundays. We should be generous in fulfilling our Sunday obligations, and we should find time every day for prayer and worship in the family, for the reading of the Bible, and for the proper training of our children in Faith and morals. St. Augustine teaches that when we truly succeed in "giving to God what is God's," we are "doing justice to God." This requires that we return to God, with dividends, that which God has entrusted to us, remembering that we are mere managers or stewards of God's gifts.

3: We need to check our heart's investments: When Jesus says, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's," the command really asks us whether we have invested our heart in the right place, in something worthy of our life's blood, something that will yield a return that's worthy of a whole human life. There is only one way to find out where our hearts are. Let us check our daily choices, the little ones as well the big ones, and look for the patterns: What do we usually do when decision time comes for where we will spend our prime time and our best energies? These are the infallible indicators of what we truly value, and what we don't. Whose image do others see when they look at our life? When people see us, do they see Jesus engraved upon us? To the extent that they do, we are making visible the extent to which we belong to the Kingdom of God.