

29TH SUNDAY YEAR A

"Render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." (Matthew 22:21).

The first reading from Isaiah is really fascinating. It speaks about God declaring King Cyrus to be a "shepherd," his "Anointed One"-

King Cyrus might not mean much to us thousands of years after he lived and reigned. But, it was extraordinary in his day. King Cyrus was the founding ruler of the Great Persian Empire, and although he was not Jewish, (and was of another religion), was extremely supportive of the Jewish people and issued an edict that allowed the "Jewish population to return to the Promised Land from Babylon, and he also allowed them to rebuild the temple and gave them back their treasures. . The book of Isaiah honours him as a dignified and righteous king. He is the only Gentile to be designated as an anointed one of God. The word means. "Messiah," or "a Christ" - a divinely appointed king.

Even those who are not religious, do not profess a religious faith, or have faith different from ourselves may still be enormously instrumental in promoting the values of God's Kingdom. and as such, they may very well be acting as God's servants, friends, and instruments of God's will, even if they would not themselves name it as such.

The Pharisees and Herodians, usually fierce opponents, have come together in an uneasy alliance motivated by a common hatred. They are trying to trap

Jesus- They attempt a hypocritical ploy where they ask about Our Lord's loyalty to the Roman Emperor by asking whether he recommends payment of Roman taxes. They are hypocrites: The Pharisees portrayed themselves as fiercely nationalistic. They hated the Herodians, who supported King Herod, who had "sold out" as a puppet of the Roman Empire. And here they were, asking after Jesus' loyalty to the Romans. The only ones touching the coin with Caesar's head on it... are the Pharisees and the Herodians. They ought to have seen the coin as unclean and repellant. Jesus likely kept his hands right off these coins. .

Did they care about government and religious relations?. Very Likely not! They were setting Jesus up in a seemingly "no-win" situation. However, Our Lord answered wisely by affirming that there is a duty to observe civil laws and procedures but that we also owe ultimate allegiance to God, who created all things. There does not need to be a clear-cut Religion vs. Government ("either one or the other but not both"), line here. It requires discernment. It is possible that supporting civil projects gives glory to God... It is also possible that serving God can be at the service of civil needs. Our Lord is not trying to build an impenetrable "them and us" mentality, unlike his opponents.

The true test is how self-serving our actions really end up being.(Or as St. Paul says,... in the second reading, putting faith into action. and not merely words. but as power, as the Holy Spirit and as utter conviction...). Jesus was utterly sure that he owed absolutely EVERYTHING to The Father, and did not make excuses, Instead, he emptied himself entirely in service and love. This humbles us and makes us truly grateful. May we be strengthened to follow his example.

in our daily life and actions...

FR PAUL W. KELLY / RCR

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