

OT XXIX [A]

Is 45:1, 4-6; 1 Thes 1:1-5b; Mt 22:15-21 (L26)

Homily starter anecdotes: 1) **“I die the King’s good servant, but God’s first.”** Perhaps we can illustrate all this with one case, that of St. Thomas More, the English martyr who was Councilor to King Henry VIII and Lord High Chancellor of England. Robert Bolt dramatized More’s conflict – regarding what is Caesar’s and what is God’s – in the drama, *A Man for All Seasons*. Recall the story: King Henry VIII of England was, by Papal dispensation, validly married to Catherine of Aragon, his elder brother’s widow. Seeking a male heir and attracted to Anne Boleyn, Henry appealed to Rome again to have his marriage to Catherine annulled – which would mean that the Papal dispensation had been sinful! Rome refused. Henry took matters into his own hands, declared himself Head of the Church in England and “married” Anne. He then ordered his friends and officials to sign a document declaring that they agreed he had acted rightly in the matter. Many of More’s friends signed, but More refused. Henry III demanded that he sign or face arrest, trial for treason, and execution by the state. More refused: he knew he had two obligations, one to God and one to his country. When they conflicted, More knew he had no choice but to remain faithful to his obligation to God. On his way to public execution in 1534, More encouraged the people to remain steadfast in the Faith. His last recorded words were: *“I die the King’s good servant, but God’s first.”* --

Today’s Gospel reminds us of our dual citizenship. We are citizens of the world and citizens of Heaven. We have an allegiance and an obligation to each. We hope the obligations will never clash. But if they ever do, we must resolve them as Thomas More did, without compromise to our God or to

our conscience. (Mark Link in *Sunday Homilies*; quoted by Fr. Botelho).

<https://youtu.be/ODEjZPHC9vU> (Quoted by Fr. Don in Lectiotube)

2) Caesar and God: In his Inaugural Address on January 20, 1961, John F. Kennedy, the newly-elected President of the United States, gave the famous challenge: *"My fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country. My fellow citizens of the world ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man. Finally, whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world, ask of us here the same high standards of strength and sacrifice which we ask of you. With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking God's blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own."* - If we personalized Kennedy's statement it would read, *"Don't ask, 'What can my country do for me?' Instead ask, 'What can I do for my country?'"* And add, *"Don't ask, 'What can God do for me?' Instead ask, 'What can I do for God?'"* Today's Gospel lesson gives the correct answer.

3) Honesty and Trigonometry: Dr. Madison Sarratt taught Mathematics at Vanderbilt University for many years. Before giving a test, the professor would admonish his class, *"Today I am giving two examinations—one in trigonometry and the other in honesty. I hope you will pass them both, fulfilling your obligations to your teacher and to your God. If you fail, fail for trigonometry. There are many good people in the world who can't pass trigonometry, but there are not many people in the world who cannot pass the examination of honesty, the debt we owe to God."* -- This piece of advice sounds like what Jesus said in today's Gospel: *"Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar -- and to God what belongs to God."*

4) Video anecdotes given by Fr. Don's new website

https://lectiotube.com/ : i) <https://youtu.be/ODEjZPHC9vU> (Beheading of St. Thomas More) ii) <https://youtu.be/rwJ8j-gNosQ> (Bishop Barron on C. S. Lewis' *Great Divorce* iii) Mask in the service of God and country: <https://youtu.be/ihrNeIdb7Ls> iv) True Integrity: the dues we owe to God and our country: <https://youtube/Jdwh1QHW1tk>

5) The Church and state in the first century AD: In the famous *Letter to Diognetus*, composed around the middle of the second century A.D., wise and timeless principles are suggested: *"Christians, neither by country, nor language, nor customs, are distinguished from other people. Living in Greece and other barbarian cities, as it happened, each one must adapt oneself to the customs of the place, in clothing, food, and rest. They witness to a way of wonderful and undoubtedly paradoxical social life. They live in their homeland, but as strangers; they participate in everything as citizens and are detached from all things as foreigners. Every foreign country is their fatherland, and every fatherland is foreign. They marry like everyone else and have children, but do not throw newborn babies away. They share their meals, but not the bed. They dwell in the land, but they have their citizenship in heaven. They obey the established laws and their way of life surpasses the laws. To put it short, as the soul is in the body, so are Christians in the world"* (*Letter to Diognetus*, The Manners of the Christians V, VI, 1).

Introduction: 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, would 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.

The first reading (Isaiah 45:1, 4-6) explained: The Cyrus mentioned here is Cyrus II, the Great, who founded the Persian Empire. In 539 B.C., he conquered the Babylonians who had defeated the Jews 50 years earlier and had taken many of them into captivity. He decided to liberate the Jews from their exile and allow them to go back to their home country, Judea. In this passage, the prophet Isaiah declares that Cyrus, even though a pagan, was God's instrument. The amazing fact is that God actually used Cyrus to restore His people to their homeland. God is able and willing to use ungodly powers to achieve His ends because He is the God not only of the Jews, but of history and of the whole world. Hence, He anointed Cyrus as a savior of

His people. Cyrus carried out God's plan by setting the Jewish exiles free and giving them permission to go back to Judah to rebuild their Temple and city. He also returned to them the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple. And that is how a pagan emperor became, in God's hand, the instrument by means of whom the people of Israel might return to their Promised Land. This passage also contains a new theological idea. To call this pagan king, "Messiah" or "*Christos*" meaning "*the Lord's anointed*" (a title given exclusively to the kings, prophets, and priests of the Chosen People), was quite revolutionary. Like other passages from Isaiah, it was meant to challenge the Jews' parochialism and give them a more universal view of God's concern and plan.

The Second Reading, 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5 explained: Bible scholars believe that this letter, addressed to the new Jewish and the Gentile Christians of northern Greece (Thessalonica), is the earliest document of the whole New Testament, written in Corinth in A.D. 50. There was more Faith, Hope, and Charity among the Thessalonians than Paul could credit to his own preaching; the Holy Spirit was clearly at work. Along with 1 Thes 5:8, this is the earliest mention in Christian literature of the three "*theological virtues*" (see 1 Cor 13:13). From today's text it is clear that these people worked hard at being Christians, and that Saint Paul thought that praiseworthy. Hence, he praised his converts for their fidelity to God and to Christ, assuring them of his prayers. He hoped that they would continue to be faithful to the call God had given them, a call proved by the many gifts of the Holy Spirit bestowed on them.

Gospel exegesis: **The context:** The Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians were the three prominent Jewish sects of Jesus' day. The Pharisees were

rabid nationalists, totally anti-Roman, while the Herodians were willing to collaborate with the Romans, hoping to benefit from them. Together with the chief priests, these three groups accused Jesus of “*associating*” with sinners and challenged his authority to teach in the Temple. The three “*parables of judgment*” were Jesus’ calculated reply to their accusations. After the first two parables, “*the chief priests and the Pharisees ... realized that he was speaking about them*” (21:45-46). Hence, they resumed their counter-attack in an attempt to destroy Jesus’ influence with the people, either by discrediting him in the presence of the crowds or by causing him to make statements that would get him into trouble with the Romans. The question put to Jesus in verse 17 is actually the first in a series of four “test questions” recorded in Mt 22:15-46. Besides today’s question on the legality of paying taxes, there are three other questions – two asked by the Sadducees and Pharisees to Jesus and one asked by Jesus himself. First, the Sadducees ask Jesus’ opinion on the details of the resurrection of the dead (vv. 23-28) and Jesus’ response silences them. Second, the Pharisees ask Him what the greatest commandment is (vv. 34-39, and Jesus’ answer silence them as well. While they were conferring among themselves, Jesus set for them the problem of the relationship between the Messiah and King David, asking them, “*What is your opinion about the Messiah? Whose son is he?*” When they answered, “*David’s,*” Jesus responded, “*How, then, does David, inspired by the Spirit, call Him ‘Lord,’ saying, “***The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand until I place Your enemies under Your feet’?***” (vv. 41-45). They had no answer, and that ended their test questions.*

The tax issue: The Jews were forced to pay three types of tax to the Roman Emperor: the ground tax, the income tax, and the census tax or poll tax. As ground tax, a man must pay to the government one tenth of the grain and one fifth of the oil and wine which he produced. This tax was paid partly in

kind and partly in money equivalent. There was income tax which was 1% of a man's income. There was a census, or poll tax. This tax, which amounted to one denarius, must be paid yearly for every male person from the age of fourteen to the age of sixty-five and for every female person from the age of twelve to sixty-five. This question concerned the census/poll tax. A census tax implied that, if one were a citizen, one owed the money to the Emperor. The Jews believed that they had the Lord God as their only Ruler, and so Taxes, or any form of submission, should be made to Yahweh alone. Hence, the question which the Pharisees asked Jesus was intended to create a very real dilemma for him. If he were to say that it was unlawful to pay the tax, the Herodians and their allies would report him to the Roman officials, who would then arrest him as a revolutionary. If he were to say that it was lawful to pay the tax, the insurgents and their supporters would turn against him and he would be discredited in the eyes of the people who were against paying taxes to a pagan emperor. In other words, to state that tax should be paid would have made Jesus appear a traitor to his country, while a denial would have left him behind the bars as an enemy of Rome. *"The trap thus consisted in putting together an alliance of convenience [Pharisees and Herodians] in which both would ask Yeshua's opinion, hoping his response would alienate him from one group or another."* (Jewish New Testament Commentary, p. 65)

Defense as Challenge: Jesus defeated their scheme by asking his challengers to show him *"the coin of tribute"* – the coin they would give to the tax-gatherer. In those days, all secular money was thought to belong to the Emperor. [The Temple had its own coinage, not used in paying secular debts.] Thus, the Emperor's image was on each secular coin. The money belonged to him and he simply permitted people to use it. (*"Jewish Palestine circulated its own copper coins, omitting the image of the deified emperor,*

which was offensive to Jewish tastes ... But foreign coins, which bore the emperor's image and mention of his divine status, were in common circulation in Palestine, where neither gold nor silver coins were permitted to be struck. The [Roman] silver denarius ... was required to pay taxes in Palestine, as elsewhere in the Empire, and Jewish people had to use it, whether they liked it or not¹]. Revolutionaries in A.D. 6 had violently protested the use of such coins and incurred terrible Roman retaliation. If Jesus' questioners here are concerned about paying Roman taxes, they obviously ought not to be carrying this coin!" (IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament, pp.105-106). By having a Roman coin in their possession, complete with Caesar's image and Caesar's inscription, the challengers had already shown where their loyalties lay. They had, in effect, answered their own question. Jesus, rather than answering their question directly, asked them a question, thus turning their trap inside out and upside down: *"Whose image (eikon in Greek) and inscription are these?"* (The census tax was paid with a denarius coin, which contained the image of the Emperor on one side with the inscription *"Tiberius Caesar, Son of the Divine Augustus"*—and on the other his title *"Pontifex Maximus"* (high priest). Thus, Caesar claimed not only political sovereignty but also Divine attributes. Therefore, the Jews considered the image idolatrous and the inscription blasphemous. Since no Pharisee would possess this coin, it had to be a Herodian who carried this coin onto the Temple Mount and showed it to Jesus). *"Caesar's,"* they said. *"Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar -- and to God what belongs to God."* In other words, we give to the Emperor the coin because his image is on it, and we give to God our own selves because we are created in the image of God (Gn 1:26).

Jesus' answer acknowledges our obligation as citizens to the state but affirms our larger obligation to God. Both the state and God require certain

loyalties from us, but we owe God our very lives. The question Jesus was asked could have been phrased, “*Whose side are you on? Israel’s or Rome’s?*” Jesus’ answer was, “*On God’s side,*” in other words, taxes are Caesar’s, so pay them; but your heart and your soul are Yahweh’s; give those to God! (If the image of Caesar stamped on a coin means that the coin belongs to Caesar, then the image of God stamped on each human being means that each one belongs to God). *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* clarifies: If that authority serves the common good of the people, then the choice of the type of political regime is left up to the citizenry (CCC #1901). When the demands of an authority violate the upright conscience of the people, (e.g., when that authority “legalizes” immorality, i.e., abortion, euthanasia, cloning, etc.) the refusal of obedience is acceptable (CCC #2242). (CCC #1897-1917: *participation in the social sphere*; CCC # 2238-2244: *duties of citizens*).

Dual citizenship and dual obligations: This doctrine is sometimes called the “*doctrine of the two powers,*” or the “*two realms,*” meaning that the life of a Christian involves a twofold allegiance: to the ruling government in civil and secular issues, and to God and the Church as regards spiritual and religious issues. By birth or naturalization, we become the citizens of the country of our birth, and by Baptism we become the citizens of Heaven. In every age, Christians are faced with balancing the demands of Caesar with the commands of God. Jesus’ answer forms the guiding principle in solving the problems that arise from our dual citizenship, belonging to God and to our country. As Christians, we are to obey the government, even when it is pagan and non-Christian. A loyal Christian is always a loyal citizen. Failure in good citizenship is also failure in Christian duty. We fulfill our duties to our country by loyally obeying the just laws of the State, by paying all lawful taxes, and by contributing our share, whenever called on, toward the

common good. Both St. Peter (1 Pt 2:13-14), and St. Paul (Rom 13:1-7), stressed the obligation of the early Christians to be an example to all in their loyalty as citizens of the state. Similarly, we fulfill our duties to God by being faithful, loyal, active members of the spiritual Kingdom of God, the Church, which Christ established on earth. Thus, a real Christian is, at one and the same time, a good citizen of his country and a good citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven, but his priority is his allegiance to God. As the famous martyr St. Thomas More said of himself: *"I die the King's good servant, but God's first."* Cooperation with secular authority may not interfere with our primary duty of *"giving back to God"* our whole selves, in whose image - like the stamp on the coin - we are made. Consequently, we give taxes to the government, but we give ourselves to God.

The modern approach: As citizens in a multicultural, multi-religious country, we respect other religious traditions. We take care not to mix religion and politics. Americans tend to see in Jesus' answer an argument for the separation of Church and state with the presumed slogan: *'Priests, stick to the sacristy'*. But such an idea made no sense in first-century Mediterranean culture. (Hence as a faithful Jewish believer, what Jesus was saying in his reply was: *"Give to Cæsar what belongs to Cæsar (i.e., his material coin, nothing) and give to God what belongs to God (i.e., his very being – everything)*. It is true that there are times when the demand for the separation of Church and state appears to leave our civil life without moral direction, but we, who belong to Jesus, have in His Church an unchanging moral compass and the guidance of the Holy Spirit to shape our lives. In our fidelity to God, then, we model for our brothers and sisters the loving, humble mutual, loving service, flowing from our union with and worship of the Living God in His own Church, in which alone, the world will find His Peace. Further, the experience of two thousand years of political history

since the time of Jesus makes it clear that combining Church and State jeopardizes civil liberty as well as religious freedom.

Modern Caesars, represented by rulers who are, in effect, Dictators, demand our faith and moral practice, our hopes and dreams, our consciences, our labor, our children. In a democracy, the citizens do not serve the state -- the state serves the people. The elected government officials are public servants. Hence Christians, like other citizens, are free to criticize their government, to seek to change its policies, to remove officeholders whose representation is invalid, and to seek new benefits and protections for the welfare of the people. Our political liberty also secures our freedom from religious tyranny and unwonted political interference in religious matters.

There is no reason why the state and the Church cannot work together to improve the lives of their citizens. There is usually no conflict -- unless the government forces people to act in a way contrary to God's law. Then we *must act in accordance with God's law* and not man's because, while the state only exists in this world, God's law exists in this world and the next. This means that sometimes we have to refuse to obey our government. In South Africa's *apartheid* system, many Christians were forced to violate the immoral laws of their government. In the United States, both black and white people violated the segregation laws of many states. Wherever there is immoral or unjust behavior, there has to be conflict, which paves the ground for society's progress. (*CCC # 1897-1917: participation in the social sphere; CCC # 2238-2244: duties of citizens*).

Life messages: 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, 1) 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? 2) 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. 3) 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. When the state oversteps the mark and puts itself in the place of God, Christians are, as a last resort, absolved from obedience. 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. Every year, we are invited to make the stewardship pledge of our financial offering to our local Church for the coming year. Our contribution to the parish Church should be an expression of our gratitude to God, giving back to God all that He has given us. This will help us to combat the powerful influence of materialism in our lives and enable the Church to do God's work. Our cash offerings signify our

commitment to the ministries of the Gospel, which are the activities of the Risen Lord! Every pledge fulfilled enables and empowers ministry. Every pledge fulfilled, every dollar contributed, touches a human life and brings it closer to God. Every pledge fulfilled, every dollar given, is transformed into love for someone else and for ourselves. Active participation in the various ministries of the parish is the offering to God of our time and talents, yet another way of giving to God his due, our whole self.

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.

JOKES OF THE WEEK:

1) **No dues to God:** A prosperous farmer was miserly in what he gave to his Church. So, his pastor went to visit him with the hope of getting him to increase his donation. The pastor pointed out to him that the Lord had given him a fertile piece of land and had blessed him with sunshine and rain so that his crops would grow. The priest added, *"You know, this farm and everything you have is really on loan to you from God. You should be more grateful."* The farmer replied, *"I don't mean to complain, Father, but you*

should have seen what a mess this place was when God was running it by Himself!"

2) Journey to God with a parcel of Caesar: There once was a wealthy man who was determined to take his wealth with him when he died. He prayed and prayed until he convinced the Lord to let him bring his wealth inside the Pearly Gates. There was one condition: He could only bring one suitcase of his wealth with him. Therefore, the rich man filled his suitcase with gold bullion. Then one day, he died. St. Peter greeted him at the gate and told him he could come in, but his suitcase would have to be left behind. *"But I have an agreement with God,"* said the man, *"to bring one suitcase into heaven."* *"That's very unusual,"* replied St. Peter. *"Let me look inside that suitcase."* The man opened the suitcase to reveal the shining gold bullion. St. Peter was amazed. He asked, *"Why in the world did you bring more paving stones to heaven when we have already finished Heaven's flooring with pure gold and beautiful diamonds?"*

3) Remember the movie, "Oh, God!" with George Burns? In that movie, the idea was mentioned that the reason God gave Adam and Eve no clothes to wear was because God knew that once they had clothes, they would want pockets. Once they had pockets, they would want money.

4) "Will the Reverend also have a martini?" A pious pastor who had been a teetotaler all his life, was invited to dinner by a new parishioner. *"Would you gentlemen care for a drink?"* the waiter asked. *"I'll have a Martini,"* said the parishioner. *"Will the Reverend also have a martini?"* the waiter asked. *"I'd sooner break all Ten Commandments,"* said the pastor. *"I didn't know we had a choice!,"* said the parishioner. -- In today's Gospel Lesson, the Pharisees ask Jesus a question involving choice.

24-ADDITIONAL ANECDOTES:

1) Value of one vote: We have all learned the value of our vote. It's a lesson we need to be taught again and again. Look at history: **One vote** gave Oliver Cromwell control of all England in 1645. **One vote** in the Rump Parliament caused King Charles I of England to be executed in 1649. Had it not been for **one vote** in 1776, the official language in the United States would be German instead of English. **One vote** kept Aaron Burr - later charged with treason - from becoming President (1800). Had it not been for **one vote** in 1845, the state of Texas would not have become part of the United States. **One vote** saved President Andrew Johnson from impeachment (1868). **One vote** admitted **California, Oregon, Washington, and Idaho** into the Union. (1850, 1850, 1889, 1890). **One vote** changed the entire nation of France from a monarchy to a republic in 1875. **One vote** elected Rutherford B. Hayes to the Presidency, and the man in the Electoral College who cast that vote was an Indiana Representative also elected by **one vote** (1876). It was by **one vote** that in 1923 Adolph Hitler became the leader of the Nazi party, an event which later resulted in the slaughter of six million Jews, among others; had it not been for that **one vote**, World War II with all its pain and death might never have taken place. **One vote** maintained the Selective Service System only 12 weeks before Pearl Harbor (1941). **One vote per precinct** would have elected Richard Nixon, rather than John Kennedy, President (1960). **One vote** by **Al Gore** in 1993 approved the largest tax increase in U.S. history. -- These events clearly show that our exercise of the right to vote can make a tremendous difference. When we use our right to vote we are giving our dues to Caesar as Jesus commanded. *"I am only one, but I am one. I can't do everything, but I can do something. The something I ought to do, I can do. And by the grace of God, I will."* (Edward Everett Hale). That should be the attitude of every Christian citizen.

2) True Integrity: the dues we owe to God and our country. Mr.

Cleveland Stroud had coached the basketball team, the Blue-Collar Bulldogs, of Rockdale County High School (Conyers, Georgia, USA.), for 18 years before his team made it to the state championship. Stroud recalls, *"It was the perfect night when they won, a night you dream of."* He was carried around the gym on the shoulders of his triumphant players and their proud parents. The local paper put his picture on the front page. But the excitement was short-lived. Two months after the championship, during a routine grade check, Stroud discovered that one player had been academically ineligible. The player had only played 45 seconds during the regional qualifying tournament, and he wasn't an important player. Stroud says, *"I thought it was all ruined. I went through a phase where I was really depressed."* He struggled with what to do next. Yet, his commitment to integrity led him to the right decision. *"Winning is the most important thing for any coach,"* he says, *"but your principles have to be higher than your goals."* He reported the error to the league and the Bulldogs forfeited their trophy. -- When the team lamented their loss in the locker room, he told them, *"You've got to do what is honest, what is right, and what the rules say. That's how we pay to God what's His. People forget the scores of basketball games, but they don't ever forget what you are made of"* (In Touch Magazine, January 1999).

3) "Large-scale gangs of criminals!" St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo,

Church patriarch, was the Church's greatest theologian in the tradition of justice. In both his *Confessions* and *The City of God*, the theme of justice is a recurring one. While he denied that social justice was necessary simply to maintain order, Augustine, the expert rhetorician, also wryly noted, in words that have become famous, *"Remove justice, and what are kingdoms but large-scale gangs of criminals!"* --- In his commentary on today's Gospel

text, Augustine immediately focuses on the real point of Jesus' words *"giving to God what is God's."* Augustine insists that when we truly succeed in *"giving to God what is God's,"* we are, in his words, *"doing justice to God."* Doing justice to God requires that we return to God, with 18 dividends, that which God has entrusted to us.

4) "Caesar died a long time ago." A father was trying to teach his fifth-grade son the value of tithes and offerings. The boy listened attentively, and then he went on to say, *"I still don't understand why you have to pay taxes."* To this the father replied, *"Because the Bible says we must give unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar and unto God what belongs to God."* -- His son looked puzzled. *"That's what I'm trying to tell you, Dad. Caesar died a long time ago."* (Rev. Jeff Hughes).

5) Luciano Pavarotti says that when he was a boy, his father, a baker, introduced him to the wonders of song. He urged him to work hard to develop his voice. Arrigo Pola, a professional tenor in his hometown of Modena, Italy, took him as a pupil. Pavarotti also enrolled in a Teachers College. On graduating, he asked his father, *"Shall I be a teacher or a singer?"* "Luciano," his father replied, *"if you try to sit on two chairs, you will fall between them. **For life, you must choose one chair.**"* -- Pavarotti, later in life wrote: *"I chose one. It took seven years of study and frustration before I made my first professional appearance. It took another seven to reach the Metropolitan Opera. And now I think whether it's laying bricks, writing a book--whatever we choose--we should give ourselves to it. Commitment, that's the key. Choose one chair."*

6) "Do you go to Church every Sunday?" A young lady was soaking up the sun's rays on a Florida beach when a little boy in his swimming trunks, carrying a towel, came up to her and asked her, *"Do you believe in God?"* She

was surprised by the question, but she replied, *"Why, yes, I do."* Then he asked her: *"Do you go to Church every Sunday?"* Again, her answer was *"Yes!"* He then asked: *"Do you read your Bible and pray every day?"* Again, she said, *"Yes!"* By now her curiosity was very much aroused. The little lad sighed with relief and said, *"Will you hold my quarter while I go in swimming?"* –The little boy was straightforward and honest in his questions because he wanted to entrust to the lady something valuable. The Pharisees are not being honest. They have no intention of entrusting anything to Jesus. They are not looking for the answer to a question. They don't want someone to hold their quarter. They are looking for a way to get rid of this trouble-making Nazarene named Jesus.

7) "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America..."

Some years ago in a U.S. District Court, I had the privilege of participating in a naturalization ceremony. Some sixty foreign-born persons were ready to take their citizenship vows. Every place on earth was represented. They reminded me of that old Coca-Cola commercial, *"I want to teach the world to sing."* These sixty folks had waited five years for this day. They had learned the language, studied the nation's laws, and passed a test and a security check. Behind them sat several hundred proud relatives with cameras. An Army color guard marched in with the flag. Then a soloist sang the National Anthem and *God Bless America*. The guest speaker was himself a naturalized citizen. Today he is a vice-president of a bank. His very presence spoke volumes about the American dream. Finally, the new citizens stood to take their vows. But before they could do so, they first had to renounce their previous citizenship, whatever it was. Then all together, with tears flowing down their cheeks, they declared, *"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America..."* -- I want to declare to you today

that we Christians hold dual citizenship. Simultaneously, we are citizens of America and also citizens of the Kingdom of God.

8) "We are 'one nation, under God,..." Not long ago in Blackwood, New Jersey, the Third U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the senior class could not have a non-sectarian prayer at commencement. The senior class had voted to offer this prayer: *"Please bless us in the future and thank you for the blessings of the past. God keep a watchful eye on us in the future. Amen."* The court backed the ACLU's contention that the prayer was unconstitutional. But surely our constitution's authors did not mean to prohibit 17- and 18-year-olds from saying such a prayer if they elected to do so. The principal of that high school did have the last word. ---- At the end of his commencement speech he declared, *"God bless you and God bless the United States of America!"* Immediately the students jumped to their feet and applauded. We are not *"one nation without a God."* We are not *"one nation afraid to name our God."* We are ***"one nation under God."***

9) We have something as Christians to render to God as well as something to render to Caesar! American heritage is full of Christian influence. When the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth in 1620, they paused to write the Mayflower Compact, the first law of American shores. It reads in part: *"In the name of God, Amen. We whose names are underwritten ... having undertaken for the glory of God and advancement of the Christian Faith ... a voyage to plant the first colony in the northern parts of Virginia...."* George Washington, in his first presidential inauguration, added to his oath, *"So help me God"* and then kissed the Bible. (It is disputed if George Washington added the words *"So help me God"* to the oath or somebody else). Benjamin Franklin, in 1778 at the Constitutional Convention, made motion that proceedings each day be opened with prayer. He said, *"I have lived for a long*

time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proof I see of this truth, that God governs the affairs of men. If a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an Empire can rise without His aid? We have been assured by the Holy Scriptures, 'Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain to build it.' I firmly believe this, and I also believe that without His concurring aid, we shall proceed in this political building no better than the founders of Babel." Every Presidential inaugural speech, save one, has mentioned God. Our coins have *In God We Trust* on them. The Ten Commandments are mostly still in our law books, forbidding theft, lying, murder, and such. Congress is still opened with prayer. George Washington, in his farewell address, said: "*The truth is, politics and morality are inseparable. As morality's foundation is religion, religion and politics are necessarily related.*" -- So, you see, politics and religion can and have mixed in our nation's past. The fact is, as Jesus did say, we have something as Christians to render to God, as well as something to render to Caesar!

10) Things we owe to God? ("*Give to God what is God's*"): Our gifts to God are a response to His loving gift to us of our very being, for starters. This means that we give out of gratitude for what God has already done on our behalf, not in order to get something back, nor because we hope to receive special favor in return. But there are some Churches that foster the idea that if we give a lot to the Church, then God will make us prosperous in our lives – a "Prosperity Gospel", as it were. In order to see how ludicrous such theology is, all we have to do is look at what happened to Christ's disciples who gave themselves fully to his cause. **Matthew** suffered martyrdom by the sword in Ethiopia. **Mark** died at Alexandria after being dragged through the streets of that city. **Luke** was hanged on an olive tree in Greece. **Peter** was crucified at Rome with, at his own request, his head downward. **James** was beheaded at Jerusalem. **James the Lesser** was thrown from a pinnacle

of the Temple and beaten to death below. **Philip** was hanged against a pillar in Phrygia. **Bartholomew** was flayed alive. **Andrew** was bound to a cross, from whence he preached to his persecutors until he died. **Thomas** was stabbed to death by Hindu fanatics in Madras, India. **Jude** was shot to death with arrows. **Matthias** was first stoned and then beheaded. **Barnabas** was stoned to death at Salonica. **Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles**, was executed by beheading in Nero's reign and **John**, leading the Church in Ephesus, was arrested during the reign of Diocletian, and was condemned. He was plunged into a cauldron of boiling oil from which he miraculously emerged unhurt. He was then banished to the island of Patmos. In his oldest age, he was set free, returned to Ephesus and died peacefully in his sleep. His whole life was his gift to God. ("How did John the apostle die?" [www/gotquestions.org](http://www.gotquestions.org)). -- Yet, every one of them considered his sufferings and death a privilege!

11) The Christian and Politics: Christians should not shirk public office, but see it as a chance to serve their fellow men and women and thereby God. The Pharisees opted out of real life and kept themselves apart. The result was a vain religiosity which had little or nothing to do with daily life. **Dag Hammarskjöld** was Secretary General of the UN. When he died in a plane crash in central Africa in 1961 at the age of fifty-six, the world lost a great servant of peace. He was that rare person for whom public service is not simply a career or a means of achieving power but a religious vocation, a way of being faithful to God. He drew inspiration from the Old Testament prophets. He said, *"Indifference to evil is worse than evil itself, and in a free society, some are guilty, but all are responsible."* **Gandhi** is another example of a deeply religious man who involved himself in politics. He said, *"I'm in politics because I cannot separate life from belief. Because I believe in God, I have to enter politics. Politics is my service of God."* And **Nelson Mandela** is

yet another example. Mandela tells how when he began to get interested in politics a friend tried to warn him off, saying, *"Politics brings out the worst in people. It is the source of trouble and corruption and should be avoided at all costs."* Fortunately for South Africa and for the world, Mandela ignored his advice. (Flor McCarthy in *New Sunday and Holy Day Liturgies*; quoted by Fr. Botelho).

12) Render to Caesar what is Caesar's: There is a story about a minister who in the early part of the last century was asked to give the Memorial Day address at the national cemetery in Gettysburg, PA. Like most of the speakers in previous years, he felt a need to conclude his talk by reciting Lincoln's famous address. The minister thought that the speech had gone well, but afterwards an old man came forward and said to him, *"Son, you've made an awful mess of Lincoln's speech."* Taken aback, the minister said, *"How so? I didn't miss a word. Look, here are my notes."* *"Oh, I don't need your notes,"* said the man, *"I know it by heart. You see I heard it the first time around."* The minister then realized that this man had been present when Lincoln delivered the Gettysburg Address. So the minister asked, *"How did my recitation differ from that of the great President?"* The old man said, *"Abe put his hands out over the people like a benediction and said, 'That the government of the people, by the people and for the people, should not perish from the earth.' You got the words right,"* the old man said, *"but you got the emphasis wrong and you missed the message. You emphasized government. Lincoln talked about people."* -- When government seeks to provide for the just welfare of its citizens, it is doing the work of God. (Fr. Joseph Pellegrino).

13) "I love my country but there is a higher authority - God!" Franz Jaggerstatter was born in Austria and was brought up a Catholic. He was an

ordinary, unremarkable young man; however, at some stage he suddenly matured. He became very responsible and began to take religion seriously. By this time the Second World War was raging. At thirty-six he was called up to serve Hitler's army. He refused to join up. *"I cannot join because I believe that this war is not a just war. Therefore, it would be wrong for me to join up. It would be against my conscience,"* he said. *"But where's your loyalty to your people, to your country, to your flag?"* his friends protested. Franz replied, ***"I love my people and I love my country. But there's a higher law – God's law. And God's law tells me that this war is wrong."*** It wasn't that he wanted to die. He had a lot to live for -- his family and friends. He was arrested and put into prison. Then further efforts were made to get him to change his mind. Even his wife begged him to reconsider his decision, to no avail. Franz was beheaded on August 9, 1943. He felt he was obeying the words of Christ: *"Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."* (Flor McCarthy in *New Sunday & Holy day Liturgies*; quoted by Fr. Botelho).

14) "Is Pat Murray on board?" We all laugh at the reputed story of Pat Murray at the Battle of Trafalgar. His version of the Battle was as follows: *"Lord Nelson came on deck and said 'Is Pat Murray on board?' And I said, 'Here I am, me Lord.' Then said his lordship, 'Let the battle proceed.'"* --And yet, while this was written for a joke, there is more to it than we are apt to think. For, had it not been for the Pat Murrays, or John Joneses or Tom Smiths and others who were on hand doing their duty, there would have been no victories for the Nelsons, Wellingtons, Napoleons, or Grants, who now live in history as great commanders. – When Christians properly discharge their dues to God and to their government, the country and God's cause prosper. (A.W. Graham in *More Quotes and Anecdotes*; quoted by Fr. Botelho).

15) Spiritual Foundations: The Great Wall of China was a gigantic structure, costing immense expenditure and labour, and when finished it seemed a superb way to gain security; but within a few years of its building, it was breached three times by the enemy. Only note -- it was breached, not by **breaking down the wall but by bribing the gatekeepers!** -- It was the **human element** that failed; what collapsed was **character**, proving insufficient to do the task necessary to make the great structure men had built really work. – A like fate awaits all those who, absorbed in political tasks, forget the spiritual foundation. (Quoted by Fr. Botelho).

16) Give back to God... Theologian Jon Sobrino published a book *Spirituality of Liberation: Towards Political Holiness*. A political holiness is what the Church badly needs. I sense that we have too much of “*Church Politics*” and too little of a “*political Church*.” There’s politicking present in demands for ecclesiastical appointments, but hardly any interest in burning issues facing society and the Church. The current issue of granting concessions to Dalit-Christians (former untouchables) in India is significant. Is this a political or a religious question? -- I frame the question differently: “*Is there anything which is not political? Or anything which is not religious?*” Evidently, everything belongs to God. Let us give back to God even what belongs to Caesar. (Francis Gonsalves in *Sunday Seeds for Gospel Deeds*; quoted by Fr. Botelho).

17) Separation of Church and state: “*One nation under God*” is in the Pledge of Allegiance. A Ten Commandments monument is in a local courthouse. A Manger Scene is on the town common. “*In God we trust*” is on our currency. What do you think of when you hear those things? For millions of Americans it’s the following: “YOU CAN’T DO THAT! THAT’S A VIOLATION OF THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE!” But is it? Is

that true? Is it really unconstitutional to pray or hand out Bibles in school? Is it really wrong for politicians to form their views based on their Faith? Is it wrong for the state to give Churches "Tax Exempt Status"? Let me get straight to the point and say NO! No, it's not wrong, no it's NOT unconstitutional, No, this is NOT a violation of the separation of Church and State! But what about all those who say *"YES! Yes, it is wrong, yes, it is unconstitutional and yes, it is a violation!"* Three statements to remember: 1) Separation of Church and State does not mean that the Church must stay out of the affairs of government and public life. IT MEANS THAT THE STATE IS TO STAY OUT OF THE AFFAIRS OF THE CHURCH! 2) Those who tell you otherwise are either blatantly dishonest or they simply do not know, understand, or care about the history of the United States of America! 3) This is an organized attempt primarily being carried out by those who have contempt for Christ, hate the Bible, and despise the influence the Church has had on Western Culture, and they are literally willing to rewrite history in order to demonize the Christian Church. -- That being said, can we close early and go home? I mean, what else is there to say? No! This morning we are going to look at what America has believed traditionally, and we will also take a look at what the Scriptures say about the role of the Church and government. (Rev. Michael Grant).

18) Tax Day, it is also the day the Titanic was sunk and the day Lincoln was shot. It's still a long time until April 15th, and I don't mean to remind you of that prematurely, but did you know that April 15th is not only Income Tax Day? It is also the day the Titanic was sunk, and the day Lincoln was shot. You see, it is just a bad day all the way around! Someone said once, *"You may not agree with every department of the government, but you really have to hand it to the IRS!"* Another cynic has said, *"Death and taxes may always be with us, but at least death doesn't get worse every time*

Congress meets.” Arthur Godfrey once said, “I feel honored to pay taxes in America. The thing is, I could probably feel just as honored for about half the price.” Someone also once said that the Eiffel Tower is the Empire State Building after taxes. Most people don’t enjoy paying taxes. We just do it. -- Well, the people had to pay taxes in Jesus’ time, too. Even worse, they had to pay them to a government they despised -- Rome. Today’s Gospel is about our duties to God and our nation. (Rev. Edward F. Markquart)

19) Rockefeller started giving to God His due and lived: That was a lesson learned by John D. Rockefeller, Sr. He drove himself hard to be a success. He became a millionaire by the age of twenty-three and by the age of fifty was the richest man on earth. Then at fifty-three years of age, Rockefeller developed a serious illness which caused the hair on his head, his eyebrows, and eyelashes to drop off. Even though he was the world’s only billionaire and could have almost anything on earth he wanted, he could only digest milk and crackers. He became shrunken like a mummy. He could not sleep, would not smile, and nothing in life meant much to him at all. Doctors predicted that within a year he would be dead. -- One night, however, as Rockefeller struggled to fall asleep, he came to grips with his life. He realized that he could take nothing with him into the next world. The next day he embarked on a new way of living. Rather than hoarding his money and possessions, he began to give them away to persons in need. Establishing the Rockefeller Foundation, he channeled his fortune into hospitals, research, and mission work. His contributions eventually led to the discovery of penicillin as well as cures for malaria, tuberculosis, and diphtheria. At age 53, Rockefeller was given a year to live. By learning to live by the principle of giving rather than getting, he altered his life so dramatically that he eventually lived to the ripe old age of ninety-eight. (Rev. Edward F. Markquart)

20) “To God What Is God’s”: St. Justin, a layman who died a martyr around the year 165, was born of Greek parents in Palestine, and was a philosopher by profession. His search for truth brought him into Christianity; and after his conversion he staunchly defended the Faith in speech, in writings and finally in blood. During a period of persecution, Justin, who had come to Rome, was arrested as a Christian along with several other believers. The prefect, Rusticus, after some initial questions, said to the Christians: *“Let us come to the point ... Agree together to offer sacrifice to the gods.”* Justin the philosopher replied with dignity, *“No one of sound mind turns from piety to impiety.”* Rusticus warned: *“If you do not obey, you will be punished without mercy.”* Justin said, *“We are confident that if we suffer the penalty for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved...”* His companions concurred: *“Do what you will. We are Christians, and we do not offer sacrifice to idols.”* So Rusticus pronounced judgment: *“Those who have refused to offer sacrifice and yield to the emperor’s edict are to be led away to be scourged and beheaded in accordance with the laws.”* -- Justin and his companions not only accepted the sentence, they thanked God for it. *“... Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s but give to God what is God’s.”* (Mt, 22:21. Gospel of the day). (Father Robert F. McNamara).

21) Restoring the rights of God: The Rosary Saves Brazil from Communism, 1962-1964: The world was in a state of fear and confusion. Russia was trying to make headway in converting as many countries as possible to Communism under their rule. Impoverished nations with corrupt governments in turmoil were easy targets. Cuba had just fallen to the Soviets in 1960, and Brazil was another planned conquest. The president of Brazil, Joao Goulart, was pushing for a Communist form of government. He began to install known Communists into high governmental positions while at the same time dispatching representatives

to convince the citizens that Communism was good for the country. With Catholicism still strong in the country, Cardinal de Barros Camara told people through a weekly radio address that by following the directives of Our Lady of Fatima regarding prayer and penance, Brazil could overthrow the Communist threat. In a speech, President Goulart mocked the rosary, saying that governmental control, not reciting the prayers of the rosary, would save the economy from collapse. During this time, he was lining his pockets with dollars given to Brazil in foreign aid from the U.S. and other countries.

A Brazilian woman named Dona Amelia Bastos was very concerned about this imminent danger. Her husband belonged to a group of men called the Anti-Reds who were opposed to Communism in Brazil. One night Dona Amelia listened as the Anti-Reds discussed the threat facing their beloved country. She decided that she too could do something about it. Of her decision, she said, *"I suddenly decided that politics had become too important to be left entirely to the men. Moreover, who has more at stake in what's happening to our country than we women?"* She immediately formed a group called *Campaign of Women for Democracy (CAMDE)* and started to recruit as many people as possible to pray the rosary in large groups to thwart the plan for Communist takeover. In a town called *Belo Horizonte* a group of 20,000 women reciting the rosary aloud broke up a pro-Communist rally. The success of this peaceful protest fed the impetus for the Catholic women to do more. With the help of Heaven and the strong influence of Archbishop Cardinal de Barros Camara, Dona Amelia recruited an amazing 600,000 women who marched in Sao Paulo to pray the rosary for peace. They called their protest, *"March of the Family with God Toward Freedom."* under the declaration, *"Mother of God, preserve us from the fate and suffering of the martyred women of Cuba, Poland, Hungary, and other*

enslaved nations." Leone Brizola, a Communist high government official, left in a rage when his planned speech was thwarted by the rattling of 3000 rosaries and the murmuring of the prayers in the assembly hall. Not one life was lost in this most amazing peaceful anti-Communist protest, which is described by many witnesses as, *"One of the most moving demonstrations in Brazilian History."* -- Many more rosary rallies were held in major cities in spite of threats of military action against the crusading women. Under this mounting pressure, on April 1, 1964 President Goulart fled the country along with many members of the government. Let us pray the rosary to protect our country from falling to corruption! (Lectio Divina).

22) How a Christian in today's world can render to God the homage of truth.

When Minister Joe Wright was asked to open the new session of the Kansas Senate, everyone was expecting the usual generalities, but this is what they heard: *"Heavenly Father, we come before you today to ask your forgiveness and to seek your direction and guidance. We know your Word says, "Woe to those who call evil good", but that is exactly what **we have done**. We have lost our spiritual equilibrium and reversed **our values**. We have exploited the poor and called it **the lottery**. We have rewarded laziness and called it **welfare**. We have killed our unborn and called it **choice**. We have shot abortionists and called it **justifiable**. We have neglected to discipline our children and called it **building self-esteem**. We have abused power and called it **politics**. We have coveted our neighbor's possessions and called it **ambition**. We have polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it **freedom of expression**. We have ridiculed the time-honored values of our forefathers and called it **enlightenment**. Search us, O God, and know our hearts today; cleanse us from every sin and set us free. Amen!"* The

response was immediate. A number of legislators walked out during the prayer in protest. In six short weeks, Central Christian Church, where Rev. Wright is pastor, logged more than 5,000 phone calls with only 47 of those calls responding negatively. The church is now receiving international requests for copies of this prayer from India, Africa and Korea.

Commentator Paul Harvey aired this prayer on his radio program, *"The Rest of the Story"* and received a larger response to this program than any other he has aired. -- With the Lord's help, may this prayer sweep over our nation and wholeheartedly become our desire so that we again can be called "one nation under God." (Lectio Divina).

23) "Billy, you are, and the Head Chief, Jesus, is holding your hand." In Phoenix, Arizona, a 26-year-old mother stared down at the 6-year-old son who was dying of terminal leukemia. Although her heart was filled with sadness, she also had a strong feeling of determination. Like any parent, she wanted her son to grow up and fulfill all his dreams. Now that was no longer possible! The leukemia would see to that. But she still wanted her son's dream to come true. She took her son's hand and asked, *"Billy, did you ever think about what you wanted to be once you grow up? Did you ever dream and wish what would you do with your life?"* "Mommy, I always wanted to be a fireman when I grew up." Mom smiled back and said, *"Let's see if we can make your wish come true."* Later that day she went to her local Fire Department in Phoenix, Arizona, where she met Fireman Bob, who had a heart as big as Phoenix. She explained her son's final wish and asked if it might be possible to give her 6-year-old son a ride around the block on a fire engine. Fireman Bob said, *"Look, we can do better than that. If you have your son ready at seven o'clock Wednesday morning, we will make him an honorary Fireman for the whole day. He can come down to the fire station, eat with us, go out on all the fire calls, the whole nine yards! And if you give us*

his sizes, we can get a real fire uniform for him, with a real fire hat – not a toy – one with the emblem of the Phoenix Fire Department on it, a yellow slicker like we wear and rubber boots. They're all manufactured right here in Phoenix, so we can get them fast." Three days later Fireman Bob picked up Billy, dressed him in his uniform and escorted him from his hospital bed to the waiting hook and ladder truck. Billy got to sit on the back of the truck and help steer it back to the fire station. He was in heaven. There were three fire calls in Phoenix that day and Billy got to go out on all three calls. He rode in the different fire engines, the Paramedic's van and even the fire chief's car. He was also videotaped for the local news program.

Having his dream come true, with all the love and attention that was lavished upon him, so deeply touched Billy, that he lived three months longer than any doctor thought possible. One night all his vital signs began to drop dramatically and the head nurse, who believed in the hospice concept that no one should die alone, began to call the family members to the hospital. Then she remembered the day Billy had spent as a Fireman, so she called the Fire Chief and asked if it would be possible to send a fireman in uniform to the hospital to be with Billy as he made his transition. The chief replied, *"We can do better than that. We will be there in five minutes. Will you please do me a favor? When you hear the sirens screaming and see the lights flashing, will you announce over the PA system that there is not a fire? It is the department coming to see one of its finest members one more time. And will you open the window to his room?"* About five minutes later a hook and ladder truck arrived at the hospital and extended its ladder up to Billy's third floor open window --- 16 fire-fighters climbed up the ladder into Billy's room! With his mother's permission they hugged him and held him and told him how much they LOVED him. With his dying breath, Billy looked up at the fire chief and said, *"Chief, am I really a fireman now?"* "Billy,

you are, and the Head Chief, Jesus, is holding your hand”, the chief said. --
 With those words, Billy smiled and said, *“I know. He’s been holding my hand all day, and the angels have been singing.”* He closed his eyes one last time.
 (Lectio Divina).

24) We Are Citizens of This World: In an invocation prayer at the United States Senate, Peter Marshall said, *“Lord Jesus, Thou who art the Way, the Truth, and the Life, hear us as we pray for the truth that shall make men free. Teach us that liberty is not only to be loved but also to be lived. Liberty is too precious a thing to be buried in books. It costs too much to be hoarded. Make us to see that our **liberty is** not the right to do as we please, but **the opportunity to please to do what is right.**”* -- It is unthinkable that a Christian would not vote! It is unthinkable that Christians would not run for public office! It is unthinkable that Christians would withdraw from the responsibility of taking part in public life. The Christian has a responsibility to Caesar for all the privileges which the rule of Caesar brings. We are citizens of this world and must be good ones, if we are Christ's disciples.
 Jerry L. Schmalenberger, *When Christians Quarrel*, CSS Publishing Co., Inc.

FR. TONY KADAVIL

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