

## **29<sup>TH</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2008**

This period of general election time in our country gives us a wonderful opportunity to discover anew our Christian identity and to redefine our human responsibilities as citizens. A simple question we can ask on this matter would be: Who are we? Easily, we could say that we are Christians, that is, people who belong to God and to his Kingdom through our faith in Jesus Christ. But we are also citizens of the country in which we live and practice that faith in Jesus Christ.

Maintaining such a claim means that we are both citizens of the kingdom of God and citizens of our country. One of the consequences of this double belonging is that human history, which is in itself secular, becomes the theater of God's mysterious action in the world and through which he reaches out to us.

This idea is the main point of today's first reading. In order to better understand what is at stake here, we have to remember the vicissitudes of the people of Israel through different exiles they went through in history. After the powerful Babylonians had subjugated Israel for many years, the king Cyrus raised and defeated Babylon, to the astonishment of the Israelites. Once he became ruler over the Middle East, Cyrus ordered the return of the Israelites to their land and the restoration of the temple.

The prophet Isaiah interprets that event as unfolding according to God's plan. For him, although Cyrus was a pagan and did not know God, God used him as his instrument to give freedom to his people. Therefore, it was the hand of God that led Cyrus to victory and, through him, gave peace and prosperity to his people.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is the master of history. He directs all the happenings in human history according to his mysterious plan. If so, as St. Paul says, all things work together for good for those who love God (Romans 8, 25). In that sense, God can use any person and even a pagan government in order to achieve a good for his beloved ones. This means also that there is a relationship between religion and politics. God is interested in what is happening in the world and guides the events of history so that everything may lead to the good and happiness of his people.

All that helps us understand the remarkable response of Jesus to the embarrassing question asked of him by the Pharisees, whether it was lawful or not to pay the tax to the emperor. If Jesus said "no", he would have been accused of denying the authority of the emperor. If he said "yes", he would have been accused of collaborating with the Romans by rejecting the God of Israel.

His answer, "Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God", was the only way to put an end to that dilemma. With this answer, Jesus wanted to say a couple of things. First of all, every Christian has a double citizenship. There are social obligations and civil responsibilities that any Christian should fulfill for the sake of his country. It would be a mark of incivility not to pay the tax to the government and fulfill one's duties to the country. Rather, we should be responsible and good citizens who render to Caesar what is his.

But, as Christians, we are also citizens of heaven. There are matters and problems in which our responsibility comes under God's guidance. We can never avoid fulfilling our religious duties and obligations for any reason. As we owe a lot to our government in terms of duties and obligations, we have the same obligations and demands when it is about God and our belonging to the Church. We have to recognize this fact and act consequently.

Do our religious and political obligations conflict? Sometimes, yes. In such a case, the priority should always be given to God who is the master of history and all the happenings in the world and in our lives. In other words, we should obey God rather than humans. However, in case of doubt about what is right to do; we have to follow our conscience as our ultimate judge.

Another thing is that because, as Christians, we have a double citizenship, our faith cannot be lived in a way unrelated to the reality of this world. It cannot be practiced in secret nor shall it be left out of major decisions we make in our lives. Our faith should affect the whole of our life, including the things we do on a daily basis. However, one thing is to let our faith guide us in the decision to make in life and another is to fall into religious extremism or fundamentalism by losing sight of the balance and the discernment we have to bring in.

When Jesus recommends his disciples to give to Caesar what is his and to God his part, he is establishing the separation between State and Church. But he is also establishing the principle of balance and right judgment in order to help us resolve the conflicts between faith and politics in the way that gives glory to God. Any blindness in this matter from both sides ignores Jesus' prudence and discernment that should guide our actions.

This Sunday is also World Missionary Sunday, giving priority to the universal mission of the church. I would like to conclude this homily by referring to the appealing example of St Paul who worked tirelessly for the word of God. In this task we need each other and our talents. St Paul found the strength to keep working with the support of Silvanus and Timothy, his coworkers. In this time of ours, our Church needs your talents, your commitment and dedication to the work of the Lord. To be citizens of heaven is to care for the growth of the work of God. That is impossible if we don't share the burdens of the apostolate. We have to work together, hand in hand, for the glory of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. What each one can bring according to his talent is always precious in the eyes of our Lord Jesus. May God bless you all for everything you do for the glory of his name and your eternal salvation!

**Isaiah 45, 1, 4-6; 1 Thessalonians 1, 1-5b; Matthew 22, 15-21**



Homily Date: October 19, 2008

© 2008 – Father Felicien Ilunga Mbala

Contact: [www.mbala.org](http://www.mbala.org)

Document Name: 20081019homily.pdf