

Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time A2023

This Sunday's Gospel ends with one of those lapidary phrases of Jesus that have left a deep mark on history and on human language: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." It is no longer either Caesar or God, but Caesar and God, each on his appropriate level. It is the beginning of the separation of religion and politics, which until then had been inseparable among all peoples and regimes.

The Jews were used to understanding the future reign of God founded by the Messiah as a theocracy, that is, as a government directed by God ruling over the whole earth through his people. But now the words of Christ reveal a kingdom of God that is in this world but that is not of this world, that travels on a different wavelength and that, for this reason, can coexist with every other political regime, whether it be sacral or secular.

Here we see two qualitatively different sovereignties of God over the world: the spiritual sovereignty that constitutes the Kingdom of God and that is exercised directly in Christ, and the temporal and political sovereignty that God exercises indirectly, entrusting it to man's free choice and the play of secondary causes.

Caesar and God, however, are not put on the same level, because Caesar too depends on God and must answer to him. Thus "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's" means: "Give to Caesar what God himself wants to be given to Caesar." God is sovereign over all, including Caesar. We are not divided between two loyalties; we are not forced to serve "two masters."

The Christian is free to obey the state, but he is also free to resist the state when it goes against God and his law. In such a case it is not legitimate to invoke the principle about the obedience that is owed to superiors, as war criminals often do when they are on trial. Before obeying men, in fact, you must first obey God and your own conscience. You cannot give your soul, which belongs to God, to Caesar.

St. Paul was the first to draw practical conclusions from this teaching of Christ. He writes: "Let every person be subordinate to the higher authorities, for there is no authority except from God. ... Whoever resists authority opposes the order that God has appointed. ... This is why you also pay taxes, for the authorities who are in charge of this are ministers of God" (Romans 13:1 ff.).

Paying appropriately levied taxes is for the Christian (but also for every honest person) a duty of justice and therefore an obligation of conscience. Guaranteeing order, commerce and a whole series of other services, the state gives the citizen something to which it has a right for compensation in return, precisely to be able to continue these same services.

The “Catechism of the Catholic Church” reminds us that tax evasion, when it reaches certain proportions, is a mortal sin equal to every other grave act of theft. It is stealing, not from the “state,” that is from no one, but from the community, that is, from everyone. Naturally, this supposes that the state is just and equitable in imposing taxes.

Christian cooperation in building a just and peaceful society does not stop at paying taxes; it must also extend itself to the promotion of common values such as the family, the defense of life, solidarity with the poor, peace. There is also another sphere in which Christians must make a contribution to politics. It does not have to do with the content of politics so much as its methods, its style.

Christians must help to remove the poison from the climate of contentiousness in politics, bring back greater respect, composure and dignity to relationships between parties. Respect for one’s neighbor, clemency, capacity for self-criticism: These are the traits that a disciple of Christ must have in all things, even in politics.

It is undignified for a Christian to give himself over to insults, sarcasm, brawling with his adversaries. If, as Jesus says, those who call their brother “stupid” are in danger of Gehenna, what then must we say about a lot of politicians?

(Gospel Commentary for 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

From Father Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM Cap,

Homily given in Rome on October 17, 2008)

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



Homily Date: October 22, 2023

© 2014 – Fr Felicien I. Mbala, PhD, STD

Contact: www.mbala.org

Document Name: 20231022homily.pdf