

Rev. Derek Fairman

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time A

In the Gospel reading, the Lord Jesus reminds the Pharisees that one must give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God. This is no trivial question. The issue at hand is whether Caesar has authority at all. The first reading reminds us that the prophet Isaiah identified Cyrus as the Lord's Anointed. To the Jewish people at that time, that was unthinkable. How could a foreign king be the Lord's anointed leader? Cyrus was not one of the Chosen People. How could a foreigner legitimately rule over the Jews?

This is possible, because the people had sinned, and the line of David had made a mess of what the Lord had established. The house of David would have to endure purification and penance before the true Messiah, the son of David, could take over the throne. In the meantime, it was the Persian king Cyrus who would deliver the Jewish people from the power of the Babylonians. It was the Persian king who would serve the Lord's interests, even if Cyrus did not quite understand what the Lord was doing.

We recall that for much of humanity, over its long history, there have been few opportunities to select rulers. Rulers assumed their authority in one way or another, and everyone else, especially the poor, had to make the most of it. However, as St. Robert Bellarmine noted, those in authority rule by the consent of the governed. If the people could not accept the supposed legitimacy of the ruler, the ruler would not stay in authority for very long. That led to political instability and other problems. The best way to ensure long-term success and stability was to allow people to participate in the political process, and to let their voices be heard.

What does this mean for us? No matter what happens in our lives, the Lord Jesus is the true King. Although we participate in the political process by our voting, that does not change who oversees our world. The Lord Jesus is still King, and He is the One who exercises dominion over our world. Sometimes people get overwhelmed by this or that issue. There is no problem being concerned about the country and the world, and wanting to see things be better, and we should be concerned about this world.

But that is distinct from being overwhelmed by fear or anger. Fear and anger led the Jewish people to revolt, to their own destruction, and may lead to political violence even now. We can be concerned about our world without being overwhelmed with anger or fear. We pray that the Lord guides the hearts of everyone to ensure peace for our country and our world.

The month of October is Pro-Life month. This is a time that we call to mind the importance of the gift and dignity of human life. We recall that in the political process, it is important for those who are governed to let their voices be heard. If people lose faith that anyone is listening to their concerns, more restlessness will fester in society. If people lose faith that they matter, more problems will fester in society.

It is even more important that those who do not have a voice be heard. This is primarily the unborn, but also those who are marginalized in society, those who feel left behind for one reason or another. They have human dignity just as much as we do, and through our efforts, they can have a voice. We know that the Lord always listens, and we need to listen too.

We must give people what is owed to them. There are those who have their dignity, even if they do not see it, or if society does not see it. We can see it, and we need to treat others with the dignity and respect that is owed to them. If we do not do so, the Lord sees that dignity, and He will not stand for the lack of dignity which we show to His creation. The Lord calls us to protect the unborn, the aged, and all those in society who are vulnerable.

For the unborn, they are owed the right to live, based upon the dignity which they possess from God. For those in their later years in life, they are owed the continued dignity and respect which they possess. There is always the temptation to see others in the light of utility. How useful are people in society? How much of a burden are people in society? The temptation is to think that those who cannot work or cannot contribute to society as they once did are a burden that should be discarded. The dignity which God gives all of us, and the recognition of the dignity that they have, means that people have a dignity which transcends this utility.

We need to give to God what belongs to God. What belongs to God? Everything! Yet, what can we give Him? The Lord does not ask us to sacrifice others, and He does not ask us to offer up those in society that we do not want. No, the Lord asks us to give Him our minds and hearts, so that we may see others as He sees them. We ask the Lord to help us offer up our hearts so that we can show the Lord our appreciation for all that He has given us.

As we approach the altar, we thank the Lord Jesus for the gift of life. We thank the Lord for all that He has given us in this world, that will prepare us for the mansion He has prepared for us in Heaven. Today we pray for the unborn, we pray for those who are approaching the end of life, we pray for the marginalized and those who are not receiving the dignity that is owed to them. We pray that we will give others the respect and dignity that they have received from God.