

2017

- *“Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God.”*
 - A strange alliance: the Pharisees, the supposed ultra-religious members of Jewish society, who despised the Roman occupiers of their country...and the Herodians—lackies of King Herod, puppet ruler who was a traitor to his own Jewish people by collaborating with the Romans.
 - And these normally-opposing parties team up in seeking to trap Jesus in what they see is an unresolvable conundrum: *“Do we pay taxes to Rome or not?”*
 - ...if “yes”, they can denounce Jesus as a Roman sympathizer, and if “no”, then the Herodians can accuse him of insurrection against Roman authorities—to be hauled off and done away with. The perfect trap, they think.
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 - But Jesus, of course, knows their hypocrisy.
 - One of the best ways to know that anyone is trying to deceive or cheat or manipulate is by their excessive flattery.
 - *“Why are you testing me, you hypocrites?”* ...almost like he is saying: *“Can’t you see it for yourselves?”* *“Repay to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.”*
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- This is much more than Jesus simply wiggling out of the trap; it speaks to our life’s obligations.
 - The Church teaches that we are obliged to serve our community with our work, our participation, our obedience to just laws, taxes etc., for the community has given to us—public services,

protection, etc.—and so we work for the betterment of it for the common good.

- As St. Paul writes: *“Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.”* (Romans 13:7)
- This includes respectfulness to ALL persons, not just the ones we like. Whether you like better Trump or Obama...Susana Martinez or Bill Richardson...Pope Benedict or Pope Francis...we are obliged to be respectful to all. It’s never open season to be vicious of anyone.
- In this respect, we as Christians must rise above the vitriol of our common culture, remembering that all persons are made in the image of God, and loved by Christ so much that He died for them...and thus they deserve respect even for that reason alone.
- We may not like the person or his policies or governance, but we are called—indeed, obliged—to love the person.

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- But, of course, God always first...our first loyalty...our first obligation...our first love. For it is He who gives to us all that we are and long for.
 - It is He who has given us our very lives...provides food, sustenance, and beauty for our joy.

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- The other evening I was walking along the Pueblo Canyon rim trail looking up canyon, marveling at the beauty as the sun was going down...and thought: “Thank you, Lord, for my eyes to witness such loveliness.”

2017

- We could say the same about hearing Mozart, smelling a rose, feeling the warmth of the sun on a winter’s day...tasting green chile chicken enchiladas.
- And it is He who provides all love—which comes to us directly through grace...and also through the love given us by family and friends.
- When some person loves us, he/she is essentially a conduit of God’s own love for us...for it is God who has placed that person in our lives, and moved them to love.
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- Our first loyalty is always to our true home and to God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—for we, as St. Paul tells us: “...*are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God...*” (Eph 2:19)...and as citizens of Heaven, He gives us grace and strength to always strive for the good.
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- So, as we remember this duty of ours, let us strengthen our resolve, and cling to every more closely to God. Being with Him in eternity is, after all, the goal of our lives.
- Imagine Paul’s letter today with a little different addressee:
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- *Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to the church of [Los Alamos] in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: grace to you and peace.
We give thanks to God always for all of you,
remembering you in our prayers,
unceasingly calling to mind your work of faith and labor of love*

*and endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ,
before our God and Father,
knowing, brothers and sisters loved by God,
how you were chosen.
For our gospel did not come to you in word alone,
but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with much conviction.*

- God assures us today through the prophet Isaiah that: “*I am the LORD; there is no other.*” He is the source and goal of our lives.
- So give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, but never withhold from God what is God’s—our fidelity, our love, our devotion—most importantly given in our weekly participation in Christ’s very sacrifice for our salvation in the Sunday Mass—the most important hour of our week.
- For nothing else remotely benefits us and the world, or is more important, than our devotion to God in thanksgiving and praise...in the obedience to the good which He is...through the grace of love He so generously bestows.

Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Lectionary: 145

Reading 1 Is 45:1, 4-6

Thus says the LORD to his anointed, Cyrus,
whose right hand I grasp,
subduing nations before him,
and making kings run in his service,
opening doors before him
and leaving the gates unbarred:
For the sake of Jacob, my servant,
of Israel, my chosen one,
I have called you by your name,
giving you a title, though you knew me not.
I am the LORD and there is no other,
there is no God besides me.
It is I who arm you, though you know me not,
so that toward the rising and the setting of the sun
people may know that there is none besides me.
I am the LORD, there is no other.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 96:1, 3, 4-5, 7-8, 9-10

R. (7b) Give the Lord glory and honor.

Sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all you lands.
Tell his glory among the nations;
among all peoples, his wondrous deeds.

R. Give the Lord glory and honor.

For great is the LORD and highly to be praised;
awesome is he, beyond all gods.
For all the gods of the nations are things of nought,
but the LORD made the heavens.

R. Give the Lord glory and honor.

Give to the LORD, you families of nations,
give to the LORD glory and praise;
give to the LORD the glory due his name!
Bring gifts, and enter his courts.

R. Give the Lord glory and honor.

Worship the LORD, in holy attire;
tremble before him, all the earth;
say among the nations: The LORD is king,
he governs the peoples with equity.

R. Give the Lord glory and honor.

Reading 2 1 Thes 1:1-5b

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians
in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

grace to you and peace.

We give thanks to God always for all of you,

remembering you in our prayers,

unceasingly calling to mind your work of faith and labor of love
and endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ,

before our God and Father,

knowing, brothers and sisters loved by God,

how you were chosen.

For our gospel did not come to you in word alone,

but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with much conviction.

Gospel Mt 22:15-21

The Pharisees went off

and plotted how they might entrap Jesus in speech.

They sent their disciples to him, with the Herodians, saying,

"Teacher, we know that you are a truthful man

and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.

And you are not concerned with anyone's opinion,

for you do not regard a person's status.

Tell us, then, what is your opinion:

Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?"

Knowing their malice, Jesus said,

"Why are you testing me, you hypocrites?

Show me the coin that pays the census tax."

Then they handed him the Roman coin.

He said to them, "Whose image is this and whose inscription?"

They replied, "Caesar's."

At that he said to them,

"Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar

and to God what belongs to God."