

29th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. Matthew 22:15-21

There are two things that Our Lord teaches us in this Gospel. The first is that we have a responsibility to civil society. The second is that we have a responsibility to God. These two things are not contradictory nor should they be cause for conflict, as long as we hold civil society against the backdrop of Faith. Civil society is not God. God is greater than that and it is from God that all civil powers receive their authority.

As Christians, and particularly as Catholics, we are not trying to create the perfect society. That perfect society has already been made available to us and is called the Kingdom of God. Our responsibility is to bring about the Kingdom. We as the adopted children of God live in the world but we are not of the world. Remember Our Lord said before His death: "If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own... [Y]ou do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world..."

It isn't popular to speak of the things of the world negatively but we must remember is that Our Lord compares the ways of a fallen humanity with the ways of God. We are not supposed to drag God down into our ways but be caught up by God in His ways. That is why as Catholics we seek to transform the world. We engage the world by involving ourselves in business and commerce and trade, and in politics. We participate in these things not for our own personal benefit but for the sake of the common good—for the sake of drawing from the things of this world the things of God.

The Church's teaching on social justice is one of her great treasures. Throughout the history of the Church she has sought to transform society not by living separately from others but in the midst of others but living in a way that

seeks to bring out the best in all people. In the Acts of the Apostles we have an example of wealth distribution when we read that the disciples lived together sharing all that they had in common so that those who needed more had more and those that needed less shared with others. Closer to our own time it was the Church that was the first to speak of the need for workers to form collectives or unions to protect their interests, and it was the Church that was the first to insist that salaries and wages should meet the needs of the family not just the individual worker, and it was Pope St. John Paul II who was the first world leader that to speak of the need to protect the environment.

Society and the Church should not be regarded separately. Remember that the great values that western societies preach, such as education and health care were brought about by the Church. It was through the Church that universities began, and through a multitude of religious orders that schooling was made possible for the poor, as well as hospitals. Western society, whether it would be admitted or not, owes its moral code to the Church.

We ought to be proud of our Catholic heritage and proud to call ourselves and be known as Catholic. The Church, the People of God, have done great and marvellous things by the power of the Holy Spirit for centuries and we can continue to do so. Each of us, by virtue of our baptism, is called to participate in the mission of the Church. Each of us by the way we live our lives as Christians, has been given a unique responsibility by God, and no one else is going to fulfill the task given to you if you do not do it yourself. That is how much God desires to share His life with us. He desires us to live with Him and work with Him so much that He left the transformation of the world incomplete so that we, the Church, through Jesus Christ and by the grace of the Holy Spirit, would seek to bring about the Kingdom of God. God has asked us to help finish the job He began. So we render unto Caesar what is Caesar's by our participation in our societies, and we render unto God what is God's by our transformation in Christ of our societies.