

Homily for June 2, 2020

In today's Gospel, Jesus escapes from a trap with one of his most famous one-liners: "Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's and to God the things that are God's." We should not read this as though there is a clearly-demarcated political realm that belongs to the Caesars of the world, and a clearly-demarcated spiritual realm that belongs to God. And we certainly shouldn't read it in the modern mode—that the public arena belongs to politics, while religion is relegated to the private dimension.

No, this won't do, precisely because God is God. He's not a being in or above the world, nor one reality among many. God is the sheer act of being itself, who pervades, influences, grounds, and has to do with everything, even as he transcends everything in creation.

God is the deepest source for everything in life from sports to law to the arts to science and to medicine. What has seized the lawyer (at his best) is a deep passion for justice, and God is justice itself; what has seized the doctor (at her best) is a deep passion for alleviating suffering, and God is healing-love itself. Everything comes from God and returns to God.

To render to Caesar what is his and to God what is his is to understand that we live in an ordered world where we have responsibilities to the state, as citizens of a given country and responsibilities to God.

To be responsible citizens means that we will pay our taxes and live within the given laws of Canada. During these weeks of COVID19 to "give to the emperor" has required adhering to directive set by the province, like the one in place for Mass this morning. To live as responsible Christians means that we will honour God by adhering to the precepts of the Church. These are to attend Mass weekly, go to confession at least yearly, receive the Sacrament of the Body and blood of Jesus once during the Easter Season, Fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday and contribute to the Church's financial needs.

These are just the basics of what it means to be a good citizen and a good Christian. Peter in his 2nd letter, in what are the last recorded words of our 1st Pope, goes deeper into what it means to give to God the things that are his. Our present attitude is to be shaped by our understanding of the future as: "we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home". What is righteousness? It is the reign of God, where there will no longer be Emperor's with temporal authorities. Rather, God will be all in all. This is the theme that we hear declared in the last chapter of the Bible, Revelation 22:

Nothing accursed will be found there anymore. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; ⁴ they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.¹

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Re 22:3–5). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

The reason we know this is our future is because God has revealed it to us.

It is because we know this is our future that in the present we are called by St. Peter that:

while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish;¹⁵ and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.²

Isn't that an interesting phrase: "the patience of the Lord as salvation?" We need to understand this in three ways. First of all, the Lord is patient with us, for it takes us time to understand and follow his ways, Secondly we are to be patient with others, as together we live with the eternal perspective amidst the challenges of the temporal realm. And thirdly we need to be patient as we await the new heaven and new earth, never losing heart as we keep before us the hope of a new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.³

² [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (2 Pe 3:14–15). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

³ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (2 Pe 3:13). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.