

## 29<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time A – Render to Caesar

### Living a Dual Citizenship – “Faithful Citizenship”

#### LESSON: Every Christian Holds Dual Citizenship

The Pharisees who asked Jesus this question about taxes were interested in one thing: getting Jesus in **trouble** with the authorities.

Jesus saw through their ploy, but instead of **ignoring or humiliating** them, he **taught** them a lesson.

And that lesson is as **valid** today as it was twenty centuries ago: Give to **Caesar** what belongs to **Caesar**, and to **God** what belongs to **God**.

- ? Every Christian holds **dual citizenship**, each one of which has its own **benefits** and **duties**.
- ? Our **birth** made us **citizens of an earthly nation**; our **baptism** made us citizens of a **heavenly Kingdom**.
- ? Sometimes they **overlap**, but in the end, our earthly citizenship will **finish**, while our heavenly citizenship will **last forever**.

It's obvious which one is **more important**.

- ? Through the centuries, the many **Christian saints and martyrs** have taught us that if we are ever **forced** to choose between the two,
- ? if ever Caesar tries to **take** what belongs to God,
- ? we must be faithful to our **true, everlasting homeland**, even if it means **suffering painful** consequences here on earth.

But today Christ is **reminding** us that, as far as possible, we need to live out **both** of these citizenships **responsibly**. How can we do that?

Let's take a few minutes to **reflect** on how we can be faithful citizens of **earth**, giving to **Caesar** what belongs to **him**, as well as faithful citizens in **Christ's Kingdom**, giving to **God** what belongs to **him**.

#### ILLUSTRATION: Part II: The Duties of Earthly Citizenship

The duties of our **earthly** citizenship are just as **real**, although they will only last for our lifetime here on **earth** - not forever.

Jesus sums them up by saying, "Give to **Caesar** what belongs to **Caesar**."

Caesar in this case symbolizes the **civic** or **political community**.

- ? When God created us, he didn't create us to be like **ferns** - self-sufficient individuals.
- ? Instead, he created us to be **social**, to **need and enjoy** the company and assistance of other human beings.
- ? Human nature **requires** us to live in communities - just look at how **long** it takes for a human baby to become capable of **surviving** on its own, much longer than **any other mammal** on the planet.
- ? Remember Hillary Clinton's book, "It takes a Village"? reminding us that it takes the entire community to raise a child.

This **social** aspect of our nature is also part of our being created **in God's image**.

- ? After all, Christ revealed to us that God is both **one and three**; the essence of God is **love**, the **everlasting** love between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- ? And so, for us to live our human lives **to the full**, we must **image** that Divine community; we must be **responsible members** of the communities in which we live.
- ? These communities come together to form **civil society**, and they **provide** us with many benefits: protection from crime, public services, and opportunities for personal and family development.
- ? And so, it is our strict duty of **justice** to **give back** to society through **obedience to good laws** and **active collaboration**, like paying taxes and doing community service.

In this sense, **patriotism** is a virtue in which every Christian should **excel**; we should be the most **dependable and loyal** citizens of all.

In fact, the United States Bishop's document "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship" reminds us that, "The Church's obligation to participate in shaping the moral character of society is a **requirement** (*emphasis mine*) of our faith" (FC 9).

The Bishops of the United States continue:

"What faith teaches about the dignity of the human person and about the sacredness of every human life helps us see more clearly the same truths that also come to us through the gift of human reason. At the center of these truths is respect for the dignity of every human person. This is the core of Catholic moral and social teaching. Because we are people of **both** faith and reason [citizens of earth and, at the same time, of heaven], it is appropriate and **necessary** for us to bring this essential truth about human life and dignity to the public square. We are called to practice Christ's commandment to 'love one another' (Jn 13:34). We are also called to promote the well-being of all, to share our blessings with those most in need, to defend marriage, and to protect the lives and dignity of all, especially the weak, vulnerable, the voiceless. In his first encyclical letter *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI explained that 'charity must animate the entire lives of the ... faithful and therefore also their political activity, lived as 'social charity' (29). (FC 10)

## ILLUSTRATION: Part III: Being a Christian in a Democracy - Discerning the Issues

We are extremely blessed to live in a **democratic** society, where all the citizens **participate directly** in the political process. But, we also have two other serious responsibilities.

First, we have to make a **decent effort** to stay **informed** about the **important political and cultural issues** facing the community - this will enable us to **vote** intelligently and responsibly.

This is not always as easy as it sounds, because **not all issues are on the same level**, even though much of the **news media** fails to **realize** this.

It is precisely our Catholic faith, full of God's revelation that enables us to **distinguish** between **foundational** and **secondary** issues.

- ? Treating unborn children like a disease or punishment or mistake, as **abortion** does, is a **foundational injustice** - what good are any of the **other** human rights if those **innocent people** never even make it out of the womb?
- ? Treating human embryos – new human life – as a product to be manipulated and destroyed for research – rather than affording them the human rights and dignity which belong to them, is a **foundational injustice** – a denial of God creating us, at the moment of conception, with certain “inalienable rights” – including the “right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”
- ? Treating **homosexual unions** like **true marriages** is a **foundational injustice** - true marriage between one man and one woman is the building block, the **DNA of human society**; would you like someone to mess around with your DNA?
- ? When we **vote** for political candidates and issues, we cannot **pretend** that **those** kinds of **foundational** issues are on the **same level** as other **important but secondary** issues like taxes, economic bailouts and plans, diplomacy, and alternative energy sources.
- ? These **secondary** issues are like the **walls** of a house: you can knock out a wall or rearrange a room without the house falling down, but if you mess with the **foundation**, you **lose the whole structure**.
- ? If **foundational issues** are at stake in an election, we must give them **first priority**.
- ? Foundational issues are **things that belong to God**, not to **Caesar**, and when Caesar tries to **take them over**, we who are **God's children** must **defend** them.

Fr. Thoms/Bateman and I have had a LOT of people “complaining” that we have brought politics into the pulpit – we’re getting emails, anonymous letters with articles from major city newspapers... It must be clear that as priests and pastors, we have a **responsibility** to form people’s consciences so that, when they exercise their citizenship – when they vote – they vote in ways that help to build up God’s kingdom. **THIS** is our primary obligation as Christians, to **BUILD UP** God’s Kingdom here on earth – not to vote in ways that promote the **DESTRUCTION** of God’s Kingdom and of the dignity due to every human being.

? This is consistent with what the US Bishops have taught in *Faithful Citizenship*:

“Some question whether it is appropriate for the Church to play a role in political life. However, the **obligation** to teach about moral values that should shape our lives, including our public lives, is **central** to the mission given to the Church by Jesus Christ. The US Constitution protects the rights of individual believers and religious bodies to participate and speak out without government interference, favoritism or discrimination. Civil law should fully recognize and protect the Church’s right, obligation and opportunities to participate in society without being forced to abandon or ignore her central moral convictions” (11).

“The Catholic community brings important assets to the political dialogue about our nation’s future. We bring a consistent moral framework ... for assessing issues, political platforms and campaigns. We also bring broad experience in serving those in need – educating the young, caring for the sick, sheltering the homeless, helping women who face difficult pregnancies, feeding the hungry, welcoming immigrants and refugees, reaching out in global solidarity, and pursuing peace” (12).

The Bishops of PA have also issued a Pastoral Statement entitled, “A Call for Faithful Citizenship and Respect for Life.” It is important for us to hear what our own bishops are teaching us:

October is Respect Life Month – a special time each year when we prayerfully reflect on how each person at every stage of life deserves dignity and respect, and when we remind ourselves of the need to protect the most vulnerable among us.

It is also a time when we must pause to give thanks to God for the freedom we enjoy as Americans and as citizens of Pennsylvania to participate in civic life. Recognizing our responsibility to promote the common good, we encourage our Catholic citizens, after they have formed their consciences in accord with right reason and Church teaching, to take the opportunity that our democracy affords them to influence the choices their government bodies will make in the future.

We encourage our Catholic people to read and study the document of our United States Conference of Catholic Bishops *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States* (available at [www.faithfulcitizenship.org](http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org)). This document provides a good overview of Catholic teaching on important issues affecting public policy in our nation and here in Pennsylvania, reminding us that the core of Catholic moral and social teaching is respect for the life and dignity of every human person.

We wish to reiterate that the intentional destruction of innocent human life, as in abortion and euthanasia, is not just one issue among many. Time and time again, we bishops have taught that the right to life is the most basic and fundamental human right and must always be defended. Intrinsic evils can never be supported. Catholic teaching does not

treat all issues as morally equivalent. The protection of human life from conception until natural death is the preeminent obligation of a truly just society.

The Catholic Church teaches a consistent ethic of life which includes important teaching also on issues of war and peace, economic justice, care of the needy and vulnerable, education, stewardship of the Lord's creation, etc. We have a moral obligation to defend human life and dignity, to protect the poor and the vulnerable, and to work for justice and peace. At the same time, however, we must never forget the words of our late Holy Father, Pope John Paul II. He wrote, "Above all, the common outcry, which is justly made on behalf of human rights – for example, the right to health, to home, to work, to family, to culture – is false and illusory if *the right to life*, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition for all other personal rights, is not defended with maximum determination." (On the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful, no. 38)

We encourage the Catholic citizens of Pennsylvania to study carefully the Church's teaching as they prepare for Election Day. We bishops [and I add, we, your priests] do not endorse any candidate or party. Our role is to teach and form consciences. Above all else, we seek to ensure that the message of the Gospel is heard and upheld. Many of the issues facing our nation and our Commonwealth have important moral and ethical dimensions. We urge our Catholic faithful to be informed and guided by the moral truths of our faith and to exercise faithful citizenship.

May the Holy Spirit guide us with His manifold gifts! May God bless our nation and our Commonwealth with His abundant grace!

The Bishops of PA made it very clear – and I reiterate – that we “do not endorse any candidate or party.”

- ? Yet, we **MUST** speak out on the issues – helping people to form their consciences.
- ? Some accuse us of being spokesmen for a particular party – but this is not true.
- ? Both Fr. Bateman/Thoms and I have addressed the issues – the war, poverty, education, the disastrous economic situation, immigration, health care...
- ? **HOWEVER**, while these are, to me personally, **VERY** important issues which influence my political choices, the Bishops consistently teach that these issues, important as they are, are secondary when compared to the willful destruction of human life – such as abortion and embryonic stem cell research.
- ? **NO** issue, no campaign promise can compare to the 45 **MILLION** children who have been killed through abortion since Roe v. Wade made abortion the “law of the land.”

## **APPLICATION: Being a Christian in a Democracy**

Having this information is one way that we must **stay informed** about **important current issues** – but being informed is only **half** of our democratic duty.

As Christians, we are called not only to help **maintain** civil society, but also to help **improve** it, to help **build up** a civilization of Christian justice and love.

In democratic societies, we have a **unique opportunity** to do this by **making good use** of the many **conversations** that happen in election years - conversations about **social virtues** and **values** that never even **happen** in **non-democratic** societies.

- ? Many of our friends, colleagues, and neighbors **want** to make the **right decisions** in the voting booth, but don't understand the difference between foundational and secondary issues.
- ? They are **hungry** for the truth on these complicated issues.
- ? As followers of Christ, we are called to **feed the hungry**, to let our light shine before others.
- ? Sociological studies have **repeatedly shown** that the **single biggest influence** on how people vote is not the mass media, but the input and advice they get from friends and colleagues.
- ? We should **never** be afraid to explain our point of view and the Church's teachings in conversations around the **water cooler** or at **dinner parties**.
- ? We are **God's messengers**; we have something **important** - something **crucial** - to contribute to these conversations!

The great Catholic political thinker **Edmund Burke** once said, "All it takes for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing."

In today's largely democratic world, where good and evil are still fighting it out, let's **do something**.

Let's give to **God** what belongs to God (nothing **less**), and give to **Caesar** what belongs to Caesar (nothing **more**).

Let's help people **not** be fooled by political rhetoric or campaign slogans of "change or hope; experience or mavericks." Rather, let's:

- ? **Know the issues**, so that we do not vote just for party, but we vote the issues,
- ? let's help to **share** information about the seriousness of the issues.
- ? Then let's **vote** one election day – so as to exercise, not just our citizenship, but our responsibility as people with dual citizenship
- ? And exercise "Faithful Citizenship" here on earth in order to be faithful citizens of heaven.
- ? Let's "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's ... [and] give to God what is God's."