

Twenty Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 22, 2017
Fr. Rick Lorenz

Reflection

Do you remember the Tower of Babel? Genesis tells us of a people who tried to build a tower that would reach into the heavens. This was a manifestation of their pride, an attempt to make themselves into gods. But as God told Cyrus in the first reading, "I am the Lord, and there is no other; besides me there is no god." He toppled the tower and divided the people into tongues. They began to speak different languages and could no longer understand each other. And so we have the nations of the earth. The process continues: try understanding the English spoken by the Scots. Do we see this as a punishment? Or was it an act of mercy? Throughout their history, God's chosen people have been a people on the move: driven to Egypt by hunger, Canaan by liberation, Babylon by exile, the corners of the Mediterranean by conquest, and now Israel by atonement. The lack of political unity raised the borders but left them porous, with room to move in times of danger and want. Remember the Book of Ruth. The ancestors of David moved to Moab to escape famine, and their widows returned to Bethlehem to be aided by family. It's a fallen world, but we're sustained by providence; blessings that see us through.

Isa 45:1, 4-6
Ps 96
1 Thes 1:1-5
Mt 22:15-21

One of the blessings is authority, given by God for the good of all. The catechism tells us to give honor and respect, gratitude and good-will towards those in authority "insofar as it is deserved (1900)." Seeing his face on the denarius, Jesus says, "Give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." We love God, Queen and country. So what do we give to political authority?

First, we regard those in authority as representatives of God (2238). In the first reading, God gave Cyrus power "to subdue the nations before him and strip kings of their robes." Cyrus was the king of Persia, and defeated the Babylonians. Following this victory, he permitted the people of Israel to return from captivity, to begin their journey back to Jerusalem. They collaborated with loyalty, so they could give God praise and glory and worship. God chose Cyrus and he chooses us too. So use your freedom to practice your religion, with the saints remembering "your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." But loyal collaboration demands more. Accept your right and duty to voice just criticism. This way our leaders and institutions can be purified by the light of Christ, "so that all may know" what was given to Cyrus: "from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is no one besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other."

Second, we contribute to the good of society (2239). Work to achieve the common good so that all can reach fulfillment. This requires respect for the person from conception until natural death; development of the group because God saves us as a people; and the peace of stability and security within an order that is just. To this end, we pay our taxes, cast our votes, and help to defend the country.

Third, our obligation reaches past our borders. The goods of the earth have a universal destination, even though their distribution is not equal (GS 69). So wealthy nations accept foreigners to the extent that they are able (2241). We welcome them even while helping them to stay at home with a freer choice to stay or go.

Respecting authority, contributing to the common good, helping other nations: these are our obligations to political authority; this is what we give to Caesar. But there's something that we do **not** do. We don't follow directives that are against morality, against fundamental rights, against the Gospel (2242). It's hard to judge through the fogs and mists of the world. So we measure our decisions against the inspired truth of our origin and destiny in God (2244); "the coming of God's kingdom and the salvation of the whole human race. The Lord is the final end of human history, and the point toward which the aspirations of history and civilization are moving, the focus of the human race, the joy of all hearts and the fulfillment of their desires (GS 40, 45)."

We take solace in the status that we share with the saints: "Christians reside in their own nations, but as resident aliens. They participate in all things as citizens and endure all things as foreigners. They obey the established laws and their way of life surpasses the laws. So noble is their position to which God has assigned them that they are not allowed to desert it (Ad Diognetum qtd. in 2240)." Indeed he strengthens us, through the Eucharist today.