

LECTIO DIVINA OF 29TH SUNDAY A (OCT 18/2020)

REPAY TO CAESAR WHAT BELONGS TO CAESAR AND TO GOD WHAT BELONGS TO GOD

OPENING PRAYER: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Heavenly Father, we come before you with grateful heart for all your material and financial blessings As we meditate on our faithful and responsible citizenship in our nation and our church. Enlighten us with your life-giving words now. We believe that Your plans for our finances are good to give us a future and a hope. We confess that we will not fear the economic forecasts because our trust is in You. Our confidence is in You and not in our jobs, our investments, our bank accounts or ourselves. Every good and perfect gift is from You. Help us to walk by faith and not by sight. Proverbs 14:23 says "In all labor there is profit". As we work hard, you bless us with profit and surplus. Give us kind hearts to give cheerfully to your Kingdom because we know that as we do this, You will generously provide for us and we will always have everything we need and even have plenty left over to share with others. Help us to teach our children Your Word about financial prosperity that they may become responsible in spending every penny. Lord, You call us to honor those in authority. Bless the leaders of our land, that we may be at peace among ourselves and a blessing to other nations of the earth. As the presidential election is fast approaching, we ask you to bless our country and keep our nation under your care. Help us to elect trustworthy leaders who participate in wise decisions for our families and faith practices because we believe strongly 'as the leader goes, goes the nation' 'the fall of the head is the fall of all'. May you bless our government, civil and religious authorities to help us and guide us in faith, peace and prosperity. May our every opportunity and activity prove love, loyalty and obedience to you and our government authorities as faithful stewards.

First Reading: A reading from the book of Prophet Isaiah 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. The Word of the Lord/ Thanks be to God

Commentary: Prophet Isaiah speaks of Cyrus, the Persian King who liberated the exiled Jews and sent them to Judea, the Promised Land. God made use of this pagan

king to liberate His people. The pagan king becomes messiah for God's chosen people. This is the only place in the Bible where a Gentile ruler is said to be 'anointed'. God is the power over all powers and he anoints whom he chooses for his special tasks.

Responsorial Psalm 96: 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.**

Commentary: The Psalmist sings out his praises to God and summons all Israel, all the nations and all the creation to praise God as King of the universe. If we believe God is great, we cannot help telling others about him. The best witnessing happens when our hearts are full of appreciation for what He has done. God has chosen us to declare his marvelous deeds among all people. How well are we doing at telling others about God's goodness?

Second Reading: A reading from first letter of St. Paul to Thessalonians: 1: 1-5 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. The Word of the Lord/ Thanks be to God

Commentary: St. Paul thanks God for the strong faith and good reputation of the Thessalonians when they were persecuted. Paul commends these young Christians for their work produced by faith, labor prompted by love and endurance inspired by hope. These characteristics are the marks of effective Christians in any age.

Gospel Reading: A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to St. Mathew:

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. The Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ/ Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ

MEDITATION: "Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God". The Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Herodians were the three prominent Jewish sects of Jesus' day. The Pharisees were nationalists and totally anti-Roman but the Herodians were collaborators of the Romans. They could not accept the reputation and popularity of Jesus among the ordinary people who came to listen to his preaching in the temple. They considered his presence a big threat to them. So they wanted to destroy his influence by causing trouble between him and the Romans and so they took up the tax issue. The Jews were forced to pay three types of tax to the Roman Emperor: the ground tax, the income tax and the census tax. Here, the question concerned the census tax. According to the census tax, every citizen owes money to the Emperor. But the Jews believed that God was their only Lord and Ruler and therefore taxes or any form of submission, should be made only to God. Hence, the Pharisees' question "is it lawful to pay census tax to Cesar or not? was intended to create a very religious and political trouble for him.

If Jesus said that it was unlawful to pay the tax, He will be arrested by the Roman officials as a revolutionary. If he said that it was lawful to pay the tax, he would become unpopular among his followers because they did not like paying tax to the pagan emperor. In other words, he would be branded a traitor if he pays tax. He would become an enemy of Rome if he does not pay tax. Jesus defeated their conspiracy with his practical wisdom. In those days, all secular money was thought to belong to the Emperor. Thus, the Emperor's image was on each secular coin. The money belonged to him and he simply permitted people to use it. If they have a Roman coin, then they should be loyal to Caesar. Jesus, instead of answering their question directly, asked them a question. "Whose image and inscription are these?" They said "Caesar's," Jesus then said, "Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God." In other words, we give to the Emperor the coin

because his image is on it, and we give to God our own selves because we are created in the image of God (Gn 1:26). Jesus' answer acknowledges our obligation as citizens to the state, but affirms our larger obligation to God. We need to be loyal to God and the state.

We have dual citizenship and dual obligations: By birth we become the citizens of the country of our birth, and by Baptism we become the citizens of Heaven. A loyal Christian is always a loyal citizen. We fulfill our duties to our country by loyally obeying the laws of the State, by paying all lawful taxes, and by contributing our share for the common good. If we refuse to pay taxes, how will basic needs be fulfilled? Similarly, we fulfill our duties to God by being faithful and loyal members of the Church on earth. Since everything is God's, we must give ourselves to Him 100%, not just 10% on Sundays. We should be generous in fulfilling our Sunday obligations and find time every day for prayer and worship in the family, for the reading of the Bible and the proper training of our children in Faith and morals. Our contribution to the parish Church is an expression of our gratitude to God, giving back to God all that he has given us. By this, we help various spiritual and pastoral ministries in the parish. Active participation in the various ministries of the parish is our offering of time, talents and resources to God. Thus, a real Christian is a good citizen of his country and a good citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven one and at the same time. But our priority is our allegiance to God now and always.

Concluding Prayer: Thank you for all the financial blessings. We pray that every dollar that we are taxed will go to worthy causes. Lord, we know not all our government acknowledge Your Lordship. But we also know that, in Your sovereignty, You set up kings and depose them. And because of that, you ask us to give to Caesar what is Caesar's and give to You what is Yours. Forgive us, Lord, for the times in years past if we have zealously sought after financial loopholes and being sincere in paying taxes to the government. Sorry for our grumblings about our tax money. Open our eyes to see all the blessings in and around our houses. We ask you today to remind us that we own nothing but have been entrusted with much. Help us to have the heart of a faithful steward rather than of a greedy miser. Thank you, God, for everyone who paid their taxes in years gone by. Because of them, we are blessed with leisures, public and private schools, safe drinking water and clean air, a comfortable home, hospitals and Medicare for health, free vaccinations against polio and other diseases and thank you Lord for those who have blessed our lives through their taxes in the past and for the chance to bless the lives of others with ours. May you bless us that we might become a blessing to our nation, church, society and our family.