

Readings: Isaiah 45: 1, 4-6; Thessalonians 1: 1-5; Matthew 22: 15-21



Fr Michael says:

God and Caesar

We enter what can be a ticklish situation: the relationships between the Church and State and how they should interact. God's care for His people is made clear in the Reading from Isaiah, God empowering Cyrus to bring about the Second Exodus. This is further developed in the care and concern that Paul has for the Christians in Thessalonica, the earliest writings that we possess for the Christian Testament and how Jesus deals with the situation is the heart of the Gospel today.

What is our response? We all have seen and heard the weaknesses of so many politicians and this can easily flow into a denigration of politics and so our ignoring the issues which are involved and which demand a Christian response. It is so easy to leave things to those who are dynamic; it is easy to slide into extremism! If WE do not presents things from a Christian point of view – who is going to do so? Where is our involvement in local and national government? Catholics have a reputation for standing back and that needs to change!

Dag Hammarskjold was a great servant of peace and Secretary-General of the UN, it was for him a religious vocation, a way of being faithful to God! He was very much guided by the prophets of the Hebrew People: "Indifference to evil is worse than evil itself and in a free society, some are guilty, but all are responsible!" Ghandi is a similar personality, who said: "I am in politics because I cannot separate life from belief. Because I believe in God, I have to enter politics. Politics is my service to God."

The word comes from the Greek meaning "people" and so politics is intimately joined to us! As Dag said: "No life is more satisfactory than that of selfless service to your country or humanity." It is not easy to live them, as it is hard to avoid putting ourselves first in what we do and it is not easy to balance working and being involved in politics. The boundaries are blurred and overlap: Jesus' guidance is only a principle, we have to interpret it: in a sense all belongs to God, even when it is due to Caesar: if we have to choose, then God must come first. Church and State must be separate, so Jesus is saying leaders are not given a blank cheque, they need to follow principles for a just and moral result. We are members of both good citizens of state and church and we will be involved in both sides, with our first loyalty to God, but we serve the secular power, praying they will be wise and just.

In conclusion, Pope Benedict says: "The Church **cannot and must not** take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just Society possible. She **cannot and must not** replace the State! Yet at the same time she **cannot and must not** remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice. She has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper. **A just Society must be the achievement of politics, not of the Church.** Yet **the promotion of justice through efforts to bring about openness of mind and will to the demands of the common good is something which concerns the Church deeply.**"



Fr Tom says:

“Belonging to God’s world?”

Whenever we dislike someone, we are devious and cunning in the ways we develop reasons for our dislike(s). Always remember that our dislikes are a reflection of ourselves as people, of our character, and of the kind of people we are. Those scribes and Pharisees that disliked, even hated, Jesus were no different. What is equally clear is that Jesus always used these confrontations as opportunities. (Are we able to do that?) So, this week the word that stands out is ‘Belonging’. Jesus shows us not only that we can belong to different groups but that they do not need to be in conflict with each other - unless WE choose to make it so. (More food for thought!)

We all want to belong, to be part of the group and not just as an extra member but as someone valued and with something to offer and contribute to the good of the group. We know, too, that everything in our creation, in our lives, owes its origin and existence to God. We also know that each of us is greatly and uniquely valued and that we have a mission and purpose in life that no one else can fulfil. For us, belonging often means ownership. This is not the case with God. Belonging is a recognition of our relationship with God and God’s relationship with us, a relationship in freedom and love. If we recognise that everything we have and are belongs to God, it frees us up immensely – no more worries about safeguarding or security, we become people of gratitude with a desire to reflect that love and freedom of God, to be profligate about our generosity; no longer desiring to own people or goods or property. This then helps us makes sense of Genesis which tells us that we are stewards (not owners) of creation and because of God’s love we will want the best for that creation and especially for the people among whom we live. Because everything belongs to God, we will have an even greater desire to watch over and care for it than if we owned it.

If we had had the wisdom to recognise the immense value of the belief of the American Indians for whom the earth was mother. They could not understand how anyone could buy and sell land. Just think what that would do for house prices if the land was not included in the sale. House prices would halve overnight!! It would also free us from the immense problems we have created for ourselves in the housing market. (See the work of Community Land Trusts who seek to recreate this situation)

One commentator on the Gospel reminded me that just as Caesar’s image was imprinted on the coins of the empire so too we are imprinted with the image of God, but, unlike coins that are owned, our image is something that is lived. We live as God’s children, loved so that we can reflect that love, honoured so that we can reflect that some honour towards others, free so that we can help others discover that freedom which comes from belonging to God.

Belonging to God truly sets us free! Isn’t our God great!