

## **29<sup>th</sup> Sunday in OT Cycle A October 22, 2017**

In his Inaugural Address on January 20, 1961, John F. Kennedy, the newly-elected President of the United States, gave us this famous challenge:

"My fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."

He went on to say: "My fellow citizens of the world, ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man." He concluded with these words:

"With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking God's blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own."

During his campaign some questioned (I believe unfairly) whether as a Catholic, Kennedy would face conflicts between loyalty to the faith and his allegiance to the country.

Would he, in exercising executive authority, properly discern – in the words of our Gospel - what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God?

Jesus' response to the trick question, meant to entrap him, about paying taxes to Rome, or not, suggests that indeed one can be loyal to both a religious tradition and to a secular power.

There should be is no reason why the state and the Church cannot work together to improve the lives of their citizens.

In that regard, we can take a lesson from the ancient world as we see in our First Reading, where a pagan ruler and the Jewish people could have similar goals.

Cyrus, also known as Cyrus the Great, extended his rule to a large section of the Near East during the 6th century BC.

After his conquest of Babylon, he allowed the Jews who had been deported from Palestine, to return to their homeland and to even re-build the Temple.

Maybe because of this Cyrus is called God's "anointed".

Though never embracing Judaism himself, Cyrus played an important role in the preservation of the Jewish people, their culture and their religion.

In a sense everyone who exercises authority over others has obtained that authority from God, even if they may not acknowledge that fact. This is why scripture and the CCC call upon us to pray for and to obey our civic leaders like our president, governor, legislators, and judges.

We respect them not because they are necessarily good people, or even because they do a good job, but because God has given them authority.

As faithful Catholics and as good citizens of the United States, we also know that ultimately nothing belongs exclusively to the powers of the age. All things and all we are, are to be rendered to God.

No person believed this more than St Paul.

Paul's letter to the Thessalonians – our Second Reading - was written before any other document in the New Testament. Paul had started the church at Thessalonica and was very pleased with Timothy's report on how the congregation was doing. He gives thanks to God for their "work of faith", "labor of love," and "endurance in hope."

As Paul makes clear Church is not a voluntary association but a community called together by God for God's own purpose.

Paul prays the blessings of grace and peace for them. That blessing, which we hear often in our own liturgies, sums up what it means to be a Christian.

If a community and each of its members can maintain an awareness of God's gracious activity in their lives, they will know and be instruments of the peace which comes from being called together in Jesus Christ.

At the very heart of the issues raised in our readings then, is to whom do we owe our allegiance?

It is God who claims us and made us in His own image. We do not belong to ourselves. We must give our talents, interests, time and wealth to God's service, and to our neighbors in need.

With that in mind we note that today is World Mission Sunday.

For the last 5 years our special mission outreach has been to our sister parish of St Martha in Marmalade, Haiti.

Through your generosity, we have been able to provide a hot meal each school day to the children at St Martha and their mission of St Bernadette.

Fr Evens Delavar, the pastor of St Martha, reported to us that school began on October 2 for about 350 students and 22 teachers.

After Holy Communion we will take up our Mission Collection with the proceeds going to help St Martha. Also in the Narthex this week members of our Haiti Committee will be at a table, where you can pledge your continuing support year-round for St Martha.

You can do it through faith direct, by check, cash, or giving us all your change in the cauldron (We don't care whose image is on the coins). Please stop by just to learn more about our partnership with our brothers and sisters at St Martha.

God and country, church and state, the debate has confounded Christians since the time of Jesus. Tensions continue today. Just in the last week or so the Department of Justice issued guidance to executive agencies titled "Federal Law Protections for Religious Liberty" and the Department of Health and Human Services issued interim regulations expanding the religious exemption from the HHS mandate. The Federal case against the Little Sisters of the Poor has finally come to an end. The US Catholic Bishops praised these developments.

If our civil authorities are working for the common good, for the betterment of all people, if they are willing to respect the sincerely held religious beliefs of all citizens, then people of faith, and religious institutions, can cooperate with the government so as to advance the causes of peace, justice, and the welfare of all.

So let us ask what we can do for our country and for the world for “here on earth God’s work must truly be our own.”