



***Twenty ninth Sunday Ordinary Time 2005***

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

-Taxation is always newsworthy when elections are about. This passage is about speaking and listening, it is also about the integrity of both questioner and responder.

We get a clue to the agenda of the questioners when we read, “The Pharisees went and got advice about how best to trap Jesus.” So spin doctors are an ancient branch of politics. We also learn that they didn’t go to Jesus themselves for fear of showing their hand. They sent some of their followers in the company of another group as a further smoke screen. What this reveals is the fear they had of the influence of Jesus.

The opening greeting is a flagrant put down in the guise of flattery. They didn’t believe that Jesus was anything other than a dangerous trouble maker, certainly not a prophet of God.

The question posed to Jesus was a hardy annual. There were always debates going on somewhere about the Jewish obligations under Roman rule. The payment of a poll, or head tax was necessary if the people were to live in relative peace with their Roman overlords. Payment had to be made in Roman currency not Jewish currency, and that was another sore point.

The now famous response of Jesus, “Give back Caesar’s things to Caesar, and God’s things to God.” ended the very short exchange.

The text has been used, over time, as a basis for separating Church and state but Matthew’s use was much more ordinary. He wanted to show Jesus’ astuteness and his ability to use their own arguments to counter the discrediting tactics of the opposition.

The second point is much more important. It is about how a disciple lives in a world which does not put the things of God first.

What are the things of “Caesar”? What is the legitimate use of power?

Our tradition holds that the land belongs to God; that we are stewards of God’s bounty. Political power is the exercise of stewardship in a collective manner, for the good of the whole planet.

What are the things of God? All things. “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof”. It would seem that political power must be exercised within the framework of the divine vision for the world.

The church is charged to keep before us the divine vision. The church needs prophets to remind us that regional and national interests have to be placed in the context of the wider vision.

To be a disciple is to be committed to the family of nations. This means being informed about what is happening in the world. The popular media is not committed to accurate unbiased information but to serving commercial interests.

We cannot draw simplistic lines between people as good and bad, as if it were a childish game. To illustrate this we have the story from Isaiah about Cyrus. Cyrus, a Persian king, and natural enemy of the Jewish people is the anointed of God, the liberator of Israel.  
"My shepherd who fulfils my every wish"

It is God's mercy that is at work. Those who contribute to this are the friends of God, no matter from what strand of society or race they are drawn.

Paul says, that being a Christian is not merely a matter of words but of deeds done in the Spirit. We are to be imitators of Christ, models for all believers. We have seen political groups using the name, Christian but who lack a basic understanding of Christianity. We have seen those who profess no faith but who work tirelessly for a better world.

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