

October 22, 2023
Cycle A – 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 45:1, 4-6

Psalms 96:1, 3, 4-5, 7-8, 9-10

1 Thessalonians 1:1-5b

Matthew 22:15-21

Notes from Bishop Peter

THEME: "I am God. There is no other."
(Isaiah 45)

1. Isaiah 45:1, 4-6
 - a. Jews conquered by Babylon in 586 BC and many are deported to Babylon. Then Cyrus the King of Persia conquers Babylon in 539 and decrees that the Jews may return to their homeland in 538.
 - b. The Sacred Writer sees this as part of God's plan. Cyrus is the instrument through whom God works, even though Cyrus is unaware of this.
 - Examples for us: Parents guiding and forming their children (part of God's plan and God is with you even though you don't allude to his presence) – inventors, physicians, health-care workers, lawyers, teachers, business persons- all those who strive to make life better for human beings. God works in and through you for the good of human beings who profit from your work.
2. God's involvement in human living is a segue into today's reading from the Gospel of Matthew, 22:15-21
 - a. Pharisees and especially Zealots opposed to the oppressive Roman presence and want home rule.
 - b. Herodians, Herod Agrippa and his followers, on the contrary, are pleased with Roman rule since Rome supports them.
 - c. They recognize that Jesus is his own man – doesn't live his life according to what people think of him. They respect that.

- d. Hypocrites – Take off your masks! You are dishonest – show me the coin to pay the census tax... A denarius – one day’s wage for the laborer. They are hypocrites because they have the coin in the first place and should not have because they are opposed to graven images.
- Inscription on the coin: “Tiberius Cesar Augustus, Son of the Divine Augustus,” and on back, “High Priest.”
 - Jesus is really the Son of the Divine Father and he is our High Priest.
- e. “Repay to Cesar what belongs to Cesar and to God what belongs to God.”
- Interestingly God is not part of the original question.
- f. Jesus is brilliant and gives a stunning answer. “By using the coinage of Tiberius Cesar,” he says, “you recognize his political power in Palestine. Moreover, the coinage is his own anyway because it has his name on it. By giving it to him, you give him what is his own.” Remember, however, that God is above Cesar even though Cesar doesn’t think so. (See Barclay’s commentary on Mark, p. 299)

3. Some thoughts:

- a. Authority of State comes from God. We recognize this when we say in the Pledge of Allegiance that we are “one nation under God.”
- Jesus to Pilate: “You would have no authority over me unless it had been given to you from above.” (John 19:11)
- b. There is in our constitution and culture a separation of Church and State, though those words are never used in the First Amendment – no established religion.
- “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

- c. Catholic social thought recognizes this but asserts that there is no separation between church and SOCIETY.
- Actually the Founders wanted the churches to be free to act as voices of conscience to the state – separation indicates that the State cannot silence the voice of the churches, synagogues or mosques or other religious bodies.
 - Other groups are free to enter the public debate as well – AFL-CIO, CT Business and Industry Association, ADL and so forth.
- d. Thus we speak to the government about many issues: housing and homeless, care for the frail elderly, immigration reform, opposition to capital punishment, abortion, embryonic stem cell research and physician assisted suicide. We advocate for peaceful solutions to civil conflict such as the horrible situations in Israel and Ukraine and assert that all peaceful means must be exhausted before using violence and that, only in self-defense. Hamas sinned against this principle. Israel has the right to exist and to defend itself and its citizens.
- Our principle is the consistent life ethic, to respect human life at all its stages of development. Thus even in war the lives of non-combatants must be respected.
4. Eucharist: St. Thomas More: “I die as the King’s good servant, but God’s servant first.” Thus, our faith calls us to respect all levels of government that organize and protect our society and provide for the common good while recognizing the fact that all authority ultimately comes from God.

Amen.