

29<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time

October 18-19, 2014

*Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?*

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

“Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?” The vexing problem regarding our duties to Church and state, and the degree to which our faith ought to inform the political decisions we make has plagued Catholics in this country since the very dawn of our nation, and goes much deeper than questions of taxes. It has given rise to many misunderstandings. How could it even be possible to think like a Catholic on Sunday, and then somehow to check one’s faith at the door from Monday through Friday?

Archbishop John Ireland, who built this beautiful Cathedral 100 years, ago believed strongly that as Catholics in America we do not for a minute check our citizenship at the Selby Ave. doors. Though widely believed to be progressive in his stances, he was not easily pigeonholed. For example, he was not fond of ethnic National Parishes, (such as Assumption or Saint Agnes), for he feared that they would produce an ethnic ghetto mentality. He sought to invite people in contemporary terms: “Speak to them not in stilted phrase or seventeenth-century sermon style, but in burning words that go to their hearts, as well as to their minds, and in accents that are familiar to their ears.”<sup>1</sup>

Some of his contemporaries, especially in France, considered him too American and not sufficiently Catholic; it was chiefly French journalists and theologians who accused him of the “heresy of Americanism.” At the other end of the spectrum, some of his own countrymen who did not share his faith accused him of being too Catholic and not sufficiently American. In the end, a papal document was issued condemning certain propositions about liberty

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<sup>1</sup> “The Mission of Catholics in America,” address at the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the founding of the U.S. Catholic Hierarchy. Baltimore, November 10, 1889.

vis-à-vis one's faith and one's life as a citizen in a civil government. Archbishop Ireland in fact did not espouse any of these, though he loved the age in which he lived, saw great promise in progress and was a believer in the American dream! Guilty as charged!

As you can see, this is not a new question. It is essential for us to realize that we cannot easily check our faith at the door of our workplace because our faith informs the very manner in which we act, make judgments. It is not a question of our faith entering into an arena where it is not welcome in the world; rather, we cannot separate the two.<sup>2</sup>

We do not have split loyalties. We are loyal to the Truth, and we have every right and duty as integral human persons to bring the light of this Truth into the workplace, the voting booth and our communities, always respectful of others, but never pretending that our convictions are somehow separate from who we are. To those who would prefer that we keep our faith to ourselves, our answer is that this would be completely un-American. We desire to influence society, to imbue it with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

As Catholics, we have a broad vision, encompassing the whole world. This is the essence of what it means to be truly Catholic. We are Catholic; we are American. We are Catholic and we are universal. We see this playing out in our Synod of Bishops, Church leaders from all over the world gathered during the past two weeks to discuss important pastoral challenges to today's families. At the same time, we must guard the deposit of the faith so that in communicating it, in transmitting it, we remain faithful to the doctrinal and moral tradition of the Church.

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<sup>2</sup> To that end, for those who are interested in learning more about how you can bring your faith and your convictions into the public square, I invite you to come on Monday evening to attend a seminar down in Hayden Hall, sponsored by the Minnesota Catholic Conference. It will be well worth your time.

It is equally true that we must be able to speak to people in a language that is accessible, words that will speak the saving truths of the faith in ways that they can understand. The Church has always sought to walk with people, to accompany them on their journey of faith. The Gospel of mercy is not new, though Pope Francis is highlighting it in a new way, speaking in a new tone and often of God's merciful love.

The ability to share God's mercy and love is precisely why so many of us became priests in the first place. We strive to have pastoral hearts, but we also know that there is nothing pastoral about leading people down the wrong path. In 25 years, I have learned that there is messiness in life, and that I must begin by recognizing the sin and disorder in my own life, even as I strive to help others in theirs. A few days before my ordination in 1989, I swore on a Holy Bible to faithfully uphold the teaching of the Church and God willing, I will continue to do so for as long as I am able to serve.

Some of the proceedings coming out of the Synod were confusing to many Catholics, and I would add, quite troubling to me. The lack of doctrinal clarity in the mid-Synod document was alarming and pastorally confusing. As importantly, the mid-synod draft was not reflective of the thoughts of the Synod participants.

On Saturday, a final report was presented that was much more clear in its language and tone, still seeking to help people in their concrete circumstances, but offering encouragement and support to those families leading faith-filled and sacrificial lives. Bishops throughout the world will discuss this year's report in preparation for a larger Ordinary Synod scheduled for next October. Following that, the Holy Father will likely release a document in his own name. Let us pray for the continued guidance of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church and in our own lives.