

Homily for the 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 45:1, 4-6

1 Thessalonians 1:1-5b

Matthew 22:15-21

Things were much simpler in the time of Jesus.
He foils the scheme of the Pharisees' attempt to entrap him
by, well – by tossing a coin!
But this time it's not "heads or tails,"
rather, it's "heads AND tails."
*Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar
and to God what belongs to God.*

While that sounds simple,
and offers a defense for paying the tax
- to an emperor who claimed to be God -
it leaves us with the more difficult, lingering question,
"Is there anything that does not belong to God?"
It's that difficult question that waits for our response
while, in these last weeks before the election,
we ponder what to give to Caesar and what to give to God...

If you've followed
what the American Catholic bishops have been writing
over the past year
or even if you only read the four page insert from the bishops
which I offered you in last week's bulletin,
then you know that the bishops assert that it's not their intention
to "tell Catholics how to vote"
and that "as Catholics we are not single-issue voters."
(CFCFC, pp. 1, 2)

At the same time, the bishops focus with clarity and great strength
on the centrality of the right to life and the dignity of the human person
as the foundation upon which all moral and political judgments
should be weighed and made.

In offering advice on how Catholics might form their conscience,
the bishops speak of actions that are "intrinsically evil"
with a concentrated emphasis on abortion.
"Intrinsic evil" is not a new theological category, it's an old one.
The bishops' statements draw on Pope John Paul II's encyclical,
The Splendor of Truth (Veritatis Splendor) no. 80,
in which he drew from the Vatican II document,
Joy and Hope (Gaudium et Spes) no. 27,
to offer these examples of intrinsic evil:
"Whatever is opposed to life itself,
such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion,

euthanasia or willful self-destruction;

- whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, torments inflicted on body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself;

- whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment,

deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children;

- as well as disgraceful working conditions where men and women are treated as mere tools for profit

rather than as free and responsible persons;

- all these things and others of their like are infamies indeed.

They poison human society...

they are a supreme dishonor to the Creator. "

These are deeds considered so evil

that no circumstance can make them good.

Though such a list may help us understand,

it also *intensifies* the task ahead of us as voters.

In working to discern

“what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God,”

an how we come to a decision,

we should take the bishops seriously:

- when they assert that it is their duty to teach the truth but not to tell us how to vote;

- when they remind that Catholics are not single-issue voters

- when they write about intrinsic evils

and the Catholic Christian response to them;

- when they write about the virtue of “prudence” in our discernment and the “courage” we need to act on our judgments; (CFCFC, p. 2)

- and when they remind us, and I quote here, that:

“Catholic voters should use the framework of Catholic teaching

to examine candidates’ positions

on issues affecting human life and dignity

as well as issues of justice and peace,

and they should consider candidates’

integrity, philosophy and performance.” (FCFC, no. 41)

The bishops have not told us, here, for whom to vote:

they have outlined the issues and given us a framework for discerning wisely.

I would not for a moment suggest

that such discernment is an easy task.

This is much harder than making one’s decision based on:

- allegiance to a particular political party
- or one's affection or dislike for one candidate or the other
- or one's own philosophical or ideological stance.

The discernment we must make requires serious study, reflection and prayer.

For us this means taking the substance of our faith in Christ, enlightened by 2,000 years of tradition and teaching, with knowledge of today's world and its problems, and standing before God with our thoughts and opinions, asking for the wisdom of the Holy Spirit to guide our deliberations.

Perhaps the most important thing each of us needs to do in the days between now and November 4th is to allow the light of faith to come to bear on the decisions we make, and the votes we will cast.

In short: we need to pay less attention to Joe the plumber and more attention to Jesus the carpenter.

Scripture leads us to understand the Eucharist as a table set by Wisdom who feeds her children with truth.

Our "wisdom table" is this altar where we share in the sacrifice of Jesus. The gift of his life nourishes us with his truth and strengthens us to live by his Word. May our hungry hearts be filled and our minds enlightened by the sacrament we celebrate and receive.

-Rev. Austin Fleming