**Matthew 22:15-22 October 18, 2020**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from the Gospel of Matthew the 22nd chapter here re-reading these words. “And Jesus said to them, ‘Whose likeness and inscription is this? They said, Caesar’s, Then he said to them, ‘Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Election time is upon us again. But I don’t need to tell you that. I’m not sure how anyone could be unaware that this is an election year. There is plenty of excitement as the candidates’ campaigns are in full swing. For incumbents there are promises that things will continue to improve if we just stay the course, for challengers there is the promise that they will fix all the problems that the current candidate has done wrong. Elections are usually focused around promises and dues. On one hand the candidate makes promises that they will have to live up to in the upcoming years of their service. And on the other, they are asking that we give them our vote. Their promises lead to us rendering to them our vote of confidence that they truly are the best possible candidate for the job. But it does raise the question, what do elected officials owe us after they are elected? And what do we owe them as citizens and voters ourselves?

Now before you believe that this message today is going to be a formal endorsement for any candidate or party, let me assure you, it’s not. The last thing any of us need, is to be bombarded by more political ads and endorsements. But our Gospel lesson does bring up the subject of the relationship between the Church and the State. While Jesus continues to talk with the Pharisees, the question of taxes comes up. The Pharisees come to Jesus in order to trap him, the Greek Word literally gives the impression that they want to entangle him in his own words.

Jesus denounces them and their attempt to trap him by simply pointing out that they are to render to the governing body what is theirs, and to God what is his. Now render is not a word that we use regularly in our lives today. It is a word that gives more of a meaning of paying off a debt that was accumulated, or a giving back of what was already given.

So what do we render to those who are in positions of authority over us? An example from Holy Scripture is David who shows unbelievable respect for Saul, the first King of Israel, even in spite of Saul’s persecution and attempts at David’s life. St. Paul declares in Romans chapter 13 that we are to submit to the governing authorities. Even Martin Luther, in his explanation of the 4th commandment urges us to not despise or anger other authorities in our lives, and even goes so far as to say that we are to honor them, serve and obey them, *love and cherish them*. But is that how we see these elected officials? Would we ever give them the same love, admiration, and respect that we would give to our own parents?

The answer is no. When it comes to the question of what we render to those whom God has put over us in authority, the answer is the bare minimum in terms time, money, and respect. That is what we render to the “Caesar” of our lives.

Because sadly those in authority take their positions of power and use them as a means to their own ends. We’ve already given the example of King Saul and his disregard for God’s Will during his reign. We see plenty of other examples, from Pharaoh enslaving the Israelites to King Herod’s tyranny we know that elected officials aren’t perfect. I can remember hearing a news story out of the city of Houston, where the Mayor was requiring 5 area pastors to turn in their sermons to the Government or else they would face criminal charges. This was an effort of this elected official to censor anything that was being said against that particular bill that was going to be voted on. This abuse of power is an example of attempts to silence the Church and God’s Word, but we have to remember the context that Jesus is saying these words in Matthew 22. Jesus was going around the countryside preaching to people who were praying for a militant Messiah against the Romans, one who would come and overthrow them by His might and power. They were tired of the abusive Roman government that allowed them to worship but dealt with them unfairly. We see the abuse of power of King Herod after the birth of Jesus, ordering the killing of baby boys, we hear about the persecution that the Church faced following the ascension of Jesus and the blood of the martyrs is on the hands of the government. Jesus was talking to people who were tired of the established order of government, and yet, He tells them to render to Caesar the things that are his.

He points them to a proper understanding of the established government, and urges them to respect their elected officials. That is what God wants us to render to those put in authority over us, respect and honor for their authority because it comes from God.

And while we may fail to render to the “Caesar” of our day what we owe Him, we certainly fail to render to God what is God’s. After all, everything we have comes from God. So what do we render to Him? The first fruits of all that we have? Or simply what we have left over? God has charged all of us to be faithful stewards of the gifts that He gives us, and He also has provided opportunities for us to use those talents, abilities, treasures, and time to further His kingdom. Yet we instead become stewards of ourselves. We give God the time that we have left over. We offer him the leftover portions of the treasures that He has blessed us with. When we are called to serve, we do so halfheartedly and render to him service that is done out of guilt and obligation rather than praise and thanksgiving.

What do we give? Nothing in comparison to what has been given. What does God give us in return? His never ending love and eternal life. Think about that for a moment. In spite of our failings as stewards of all of God’s gifts, He still gives us life. He still heaps upon us food, drink, house, home, wife, children and on and on as Martin Luther writes in the 1st article of the creed. He still blesses us with our daily bread as we pray about in the Lord’s Prayer. He blesses us with all that we have even though we have failed.

So what shall we render to the Lord? Repentance. The same thing that anyone who oversteps the bounds of authority should give to God. We should come in humble repentance, asking God to forgive us our sins and purify us from the unrighteousness of our hearts that desire our own happiness rather than the furthering of His Kingdom and the giving of His gifts in service.

“What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits to me?” These are the words of the Offertory from Divine Service Setting I. This offertory talks about our relationship to God as His child and as a steward. It talks about what it is we give to God in spite of all that God has blessed us with, and it is a teaching moment for us after we give to God, to see that all we have comes from Him. The truth is, that we offer to God as it says in this canticle “A sacrifice of thanksgiving”. Thanksgiving. That’s what we offer, because there is no way we could possibly repay the sacrifice that was made for us. There is no way we could ever repay the blood, sweat, and sufferings that Jesus Christ suffered on our behalf by being nailed to and dying upon the cross.

Our sacrifices in this life are nothing compared to the pain that Christ went through to give to us eternal life. And so, when we render service to God, the God who provides for all that we have, the God who sent his Son to die for us and take upon himself the pain and suffering we deserve, we can only offer it in humble thanksgiving. That’s what we owe, thanksgiving. That’s what we render to God. Not to earn anything on our own but simply to thank God for blessing us with all that we have.

So what shall we render to this fallen world and it’s unfaithful leaders? Respect. Respect for their office and the authority that they have received from God in spite of their failings and their imperfection. We render to our government our faithful service when we are called upon and we give them our time as educated voter’s, voting for leaders who will see their office as coming from God. And what shall we render to God? The answer is simple. We render to God everything that is His. And that is us. We offer Him ourselves, as living sacrifices, in service to His Kingdom in everything that we do. And we do it out of thanksgiving. Thanksgiving for the gift that has set us free from sin’s captivity. The gift of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, who sacrificed his life so that we would live.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.