

**My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,**

**The temptation is great to use my time today to take a swipe at taxes with such things as: “A fine is a tax for doing bad; a tax is a fine for doing well.” Then there is this: “An IRS agent visited the rabbi’s office and asked, “Is Mr. Arthur Burnside a member of your congregation?” “Why, yes he is,” asked the rabbi. The agent then asked, “Well, on last year’s tax return he stated that he had contributed \$100,000.00 to the synagogue, did he?” The rabbi said, “He most assuredly will.” But I won’t waste your precious time with such nonsense.**

**We all know that we have to “give to Caesar what is Caesar’s” We all pay our taxes either out of fear of retribution or out of a sense of responsibility for the privilege of being a citizen of this great country of ours.**

**As to giving “to God what is God’s”, there is little or no fear of retribution if we don’t and, for most I’m sorry to say, there is little sense of responsibility.**

**I could go on and on about all the good reasons we should “give to God what is God’s”, such as a sense of gratitude to God for all the blessings he has showered upon us; or a recognition that everything we have belongs to God in the first place and we are simply stewards called to manage these resources for the building up of His Kingdom, not our own; or in watching how the gifts we offer to God are multiplied by Him to do far more good than we could ever imagine.**

**But I’ve already given those messages far more often than I ever wanted to and far more than you’ve ever wanted to hear them. Besides at this week’s meeting of our Parish Finance Council I was told very bluntly that every time I talk about money from the pulpit you all just tune me out and turn me off. So I won’t talk about that today either.**

**Instead I’d like for us to direct our attention today to reflect on one of the great issues of our time. Since Jesus turns the tables on the hypocritical Pharisees, trying to trap him on the question of paying a tax to the pagan Roman Emperor by asking them to produce the denarius which depicts Caesar and then telling them “to give to Caesar what is Caesar and give to God what is God’s”, we have largely seen this as a matter of money.**

**Today, in our nation, it seems that the Caesars’, that is, the political leaders of both the right and the left, republican and democrat, question whether there is a place for God’s Voice, in their crafting of public policy. For instance, when the leaders of the Church speak out on protecting all human life, from conception to death, those on the left decry the Church’s right to proclaim abortion is an objective evil, while those on the right believe that the Church oversteps its bounds when it proclaims that the State is in as much violation of the Sixth Commandment, “Thou shalt not kill”, when it allows for capital punishment, as any person who kills another.**

**The fact is that the conspiracy to silence the Voice of God in the public square is not limited to totalitarian regimes. It is practiced quite openly and vociferously in our own nation, as well as others. When the Pope or the Bishops or even a simple parish priest dares to hold public policy issues up to the light of Gospel values, we are derided as “getting political”, or merely stating our own opinions, which are unworthy of your consideration, especially if those teachings are contrary to your own political bent.**

**The truth is that all public policy has to do with how we relate to each other, both as individuals and collectively as a community. Public policy should be directed toward the common good, while respecting the rights and dignity of the individual person. The Word of God as revealed in the Scriptures similarly speaks to our relationships with each other, both as individuals and as a community, but (and this is the BIG BUT) as guided by and in our relationship to our God and Creator.**

**When Christ gave to the Church in the person of Simon Peter “the keys of the Kingdom of God, to bind and to lose”, He commanded that we proclaim His Gospel to the world. So the Church, in the persons of the Pope, the Bishops, the parish priest, or any other minister of God’s Word, has not only the right and the responsibility, but the sacred obligation before God, to hold public policy issues up to the light of that Word, to teach and guide God’s people in the ways in which God would have us order ourselves. And the believers who hear that Word are called upon to conscientiously embrace that teaching.**

**This is not what is happening today. Recently I heard a person involved with public policy state that while he is a Catholic, he accepts the doctrinal teaching of the Pope and the Bishops, but he takes what they have to say on public policy issues as merely their own opinions, which have no more value than the opinions of others with whom he disagrees.**

**This is such a false dichotomy. For instance when Holy Father Francis speaks out “On Care of our Common Home” and our responsibility to protect the earth for future generations, he is not merely speaking his own opinion, he is reflecting our Creator’s mandate in the first book of the Bible, “be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it.” Our Holy Father points out that these two divine commands define the basic tasks of the human race—to continue in existence through generations and to take possession of and care for the earth—our common home. When and where the Church sees public policy that is contrary to the divine purpose, she must speak out, not only against that policy, but to propose another course, more in line with Divine Will.**

**Likewise, when unjust laws create a broken immigration policy that tears apart families and denies the intrinsic value of individuals, the Church, in the persons of our Bishops, have not only the right, but the obligation, to call for a just body of immigration law that is respectful of families and individual persons, while at the same time, promoting the common good of all the citizenry.**

**Similarly with issues of criminal justice, ethnic, racial, and religious intolerance, these are not primarily political issues, they are, at the heart of them, moral issues, which must be addressed in the light of Gospel values. If the Church does not proclaim them as such in the public forum, how is the Voice of God to be heard by His children?**

**Yes, “render unto Caesar, what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s”, recognizing that Caesar’s will can often be contrary to God’s Will and that it is the Church that God has established as mediator between the two.**

**All of which is to say, please do not so easily dismiss what the Church teaches in the persons of the Pope, the Bishops, or the lowly parish priest as being merely “political” when we are seeking to bring the light of God’s Word to bear on those public policies that are intrinsic to our human relationships, as well as our relationship with God. Rather allow those teachings to inform your conscience and direct your decisions as to what and how you will “render unto Caesar”. This is the best way to “render unto God, what is God’s”.**