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* Knights of Malta *

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Chancellor's Update

Render to Caesar

At this time of year, when the weather turns cooler and the leaves begin to fall, in the United States people begin to take a greater interest in politics. In the Western Catholic tradition this interest is heightened by two Gospel readings, namely, the coin of the tribute and the kingship of Christ.

In the first Gospel we read that the Pharisees asked Jesus, *Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?* Then Jesus asked them to show Him the coin of the tribute. Then Jesus said to them, *“Whose are this image and the inscription?”* They said to him, *“Caesar’s.”* Then he said to them, *“Render, therefore, to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”*

The early Fathers of the Church discussed this. Hilary tells us, “For if we have nothing of Caesar’s, we shall not, by that circumstance, be bound to render him what is his. But however if we depend on him, if we enjoy the privileges of his rule, we have no ground for complaint, rendering to Caesar what is Caesar’s...We are also to render to God things that are God’s: that is, body and soul and will. The coin of Caesar is in gold, on which his image is stamped. But man is God’s coin, on which is the image of God. Therefore, give your money to Caesar; keep for God a blameless conscience.”

Chrysostom writes, “When you hear the words, *Render to Caesar what is Caesar’s*, understand that He is only speaking of things in which we in no way offend against what is due to piety, for if there should be any such thing, it is not Caesar’s, but the devil’s tribute.”

In offering his opinion Origen writes, “We may understand these words figuratively; that we are to give certain things to the body, a tribute to Caesar as it were; that is, necessary things. But the things that relate to the nature of our souls; that is, those that lead to virtue, these we should offer to God...It is the will of our Savior that virtue should not be endangered by ministering to the body beyond due measure; and that at the same time our bodily nature should not be over-wearied by immoderate straining after virtue...And from this present passage of Scripture we learn this also: that in the face of those who tempt us we should neither be wholly silent, not yet answer simply but circumspectly, that we may cut off all contact with those who seek a pretext against us; that we may teach blamelessly the things that can save those who wish to be saved.”

During the last century Pope Pius XI in 1925 established the Feast of Christ the King to address the difficulties that mankind was facing. “These manifold evils in the world were due to the fact that the majority of men had thrust Jesus Christ and His holy law out of their lives; that these had no place either in private affairs or in politics...and as long as individuals and States refused to submit to the rule of our Savior, there would

be no really hopeful prospect of a lasting peace among nations. Men must look for the peace of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ...

“When once men recognize, both in private and in public life, that Christ is King, society will at last receive the great blessings of real liberty, well-ordered discipline, peace and harmony...If princes and magistrates duly elected are filled with the persuasion that they rule, not by their own right, but by the mandate and in the place of the Divine King, they will exercise their authority piously and wisely, they will make laws and administer them having in view the common good and also the human dignity of their subjects. The result will be order, peace and tranquility, for there will be no longer any cause of discontent. Men will see in their king or in their rulers men like themselves, perhaps unworthy or open to criticism, but they will not on that account refuse obedience if they see reflected in them the authority of Christ, God and Man...With the spread and the universal extension of the kingdom of Christ men will become more and more conscious of the link that binds them together, and thus many conflicts will either be prevented entirely or at least their bitterness be diminished...

“Oh, what happiness would be ours if all men, individuals, families and nations, would but let themselves be governed by Christ...Men will sheathe their swords and lay down their arms when all freely acknowledge and obey the authority of Christ, and every tongue confesses that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father.”

Acknowledging Christ as King would “provide an excellent remedy for the plague which now infects society. We refer to the plague of secularism, its errors and impious activities. This evil spirit...has not come into being in one day; it has long lurked beneath the surface. The empire of Christ over all nations was rejected...Gradually the religion of Christ came to be likened to false religions and to be placed ignominiously on the same level with them. It was then put under the power of the State and tolerated more or less at the whim of princes and rulers. Some men went further, and wanted to set up in the place of God’s religion a natural religion consisting in some instinctive affection of the heart...The rebellion of individuals and of nations against the authority of Christ has produced deplorable effects...Society, shaken to its foundations is on the way to ruin...If the faithful were generally to understand that it behooves them ever to fight courageously under the banner of Christ their King, then, fixed with apostolic zeal, they would strive to win over to their Lord those hearts that are bitter and estranged from Him, and would valiantly defend His rights.”

The Holy Father concludes by reminding us, “He must reign in our minds, which should assent with perfect submission and firm belief to revealed truths and to the doctrines of Christ. He must reign in our wills, which should obey the laws and precepts of God. He must reign in our hearts, which should spurn natural desires and love God above all things, and cleave to him alone. He must reign in our bodies and in our members, which should serve as instruments for the interior sanctification of our souls.” Acceptance of these exhortations should “prove a powerful incentive to perfection.”

Aiming for perfection should keep us true to Hilary’s description of us, God’s coin, stamped in the image of God.

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