

Trinity XXIII

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[0 : 00] Render, therefore, to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.

Words from this morning's holy gospel in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. When we hear this instruction from Jesus, often the first thought is he is teaching us to pay our taxes and to be generally obedient to the government.

And while this is true, it is not his primary teaching here. His primary or greater teaching is that as Christians, we are to render to God those things that belong to God.

So let's step back and ask ourselves, what in our lives belong to God? How about everything? How about our very lives?

1 Corinthians 6, verse 20 states, For you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify your God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's, meaning which belong to God.

[1 : 14] Following up on this in 1 Corinthians 7, verse 23, St. Paul adds, You were bought at a price. Do not become slaves of men. Because our bodies and spirits have been bought with the price of Jesus' shed blood on the cross, we are to render all that we are to God and not become slaves to the world.

Of course, we have responsibilities in the world. And as American citizens, we have a little more than most since, at least constitutionally, this is a democratic republic.

But our primary responsibilities are to God. No government, no person, or no thing in this world should come between God and ourself.

And yet within the church today, actually it's been like this for many years, we see any number of things getting between God and the people of God.

Christians tend to render far more to the world than we ever should. But scripture is quite clear about what the limits are.

[2 : 28] Titus chapter 2, verses 11 and 12 states, For the grace of God that brings salvation as appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.

Romans 12, 18 states, If it is possible, as much as lies in you, live peaceably with all men. And Galatians chapter 6, verse 10 adds, As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

In Romans chapter 13, verses 1 through 7, St. Paul teaches what our duties to government and other social authorities are. Verse 7 of that passage sums this teaching up.

St. Paul says, The biblical standard is clear then.

In the world, Christians should abstain from society's godless and lustful pleasures and render to it good, sober, righteous, godly, and peaceful living.

[3 : 55] To government and other authorities, we should render obedience, respect, and honor. But these are not unlimited.

There is a point where we can no longer render these to society or to government and other authorities. St. Peter exemplifies this for us in Acts chapter 4 and 5.

In Acts 4, when St. Peter was arrested, along with St. John, for continuing to preach the gospel, when he had been ordered by the Sanhedrin not to, he stated to them, Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God you judge.

For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. And then in Acts chapter 5, when he was arrested again, this time with all the apostles for doing the same thing, he told them, If at any point government or society demands we deny Christ, deny the gospel or the Christian faith, or just deny truth, for God is the source of all truth, then we must obey God rather than men.

This past week, I read a news story that quoted a politician in Arizona who said, Freedom is worth losing friends over. He apparently said this to the man who had been the best man at his wedding a number of years ago.

[5 : 33] I don't know much more about the story other than that, but it got me thinking. Do most Christians, do we think, faith is worth losing friends over?

Jesus asked us his very question in St. Mark chapter 8, verses 37 and 38. He says, What will a man give in exchange for his soul?

For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

In conversation, when we have the opportunity to share Christ, share the gospel or the faith with others, do we do it?

Or are we ashamed? Are we afraid of being seen as or even called a bigot, narrow-minded, or a Christian nut? How about when more hot-button moral issues or issues of truth come up, like abortion and euthanasia, homosexuality and same-sex marriage, critical race theory, or anything in the category of what is now called woke?

[6 : 53] Are we willing to speak the truth in love? Meaning, are we willing to speak the truth out of love for that person whose soul is at risk because they are abandoning the faith or denying the faith?

Or do we remain quiet for fear of being pushed back on by or maybe losing friends? Now, I know there could be wisdom in picking our battles and not tossing the pearls of the gospel before the swine pen of the world.

But those circumstances are rather rare. And the reason should never be fear of losing something. If we do speak up, we are not given a spirit of fear.

Jesus says very plainly what he expects us to do. Remember, we are bought with the price that he has paid.

We are his and not our own. He has the right to have this expectation of us.

[8 : 08] Brethren, we now live in a time where we cannot render blind allegiance to governmental, corporate, or any of the social institutions in the world. The tide is absolutely turned.

Currently, the main attack is on our social, health, and economic liberties. But soon, that attack will be on our liberties in Christ. Our liberty to believe, speak, and practice the faith publicly.

How much ground are we willing to yield to Caesar? We all like to think that if pushed, we would staunchly defend and even die for the faith.

That we, like many of the first Christians, are willing to be imprisoned, crucified, or thrown to the lions rather than deny Christ. But what does being pushed really mean to us?

When or where does it start? In the early years of the church, the Roman Empire accepted a person offering only one grain of incense in worship to the emperor to apostatize the faith and save their lives.

[9 : 29] Just one grain. Many did offer that grain, but others would not lost and lost their lives for it.

What about us? While we still have full liberty to do so, if we are not willing to speak about the hope we have in Christ, or not willing to speak the truth and love on moral and social issues, what will we do when taking a stand for Christ costs us our pursuit of happiness, our liberty, or our life?

would we deny him? Now, I know, these are uncomfortable questions, but the signs of the time show they have to be asked.

May we render to Caesar all Jesus says that we can, but more importantly, may we render to God all that Jesus says we must, all that we are.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Amen.