

“Render to God the things that are God’s”

Folks, it's sixteen days until election day. Are you tired of all the politics – the bickering, name calling, talking over one another? Are you on the outs with a family member, or friend, stemming from an argument about political or social issues? Do you feel like you're pressed into a corner? Unfriended anyone lately on social media? Have you just given up – because of the total polarization in society?

“Are you better off now than you were four years ago?” That’s a question you are asked to ponder every four years – and the ones who ask want you to give a certain answer. But let me ask you this. Is God more or less God than He was four years ago?

The Introit says that the Lord is your Keeper. The Collect says that He is your Protector, Ruler and Guide. Has that changed over the past four years? Is Jesus any less your Savior today?

Cyrus, Caesar, Herod, Pontius Pilate, Trump, Biden – they are not the Messiah – but they are God’s servants to do you good! Does that shock you? Do you marvel at these words?

Cyrus was a foreign king, king of the Persians – but the Lord calls him His shepherd, His anointed one (that’s what “Christ” means!). And yet, even though he was a pagan – the Lord used Cyrus to bring the exiles back to the Promised Land.

Caesar claimed to be a god. The coin handed over to Jesus bore an image of the emperor’s head with the inscription – “Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus” – and on the other side it had, “*pontifex maximus*” which would be understood as “high priest.”

Herod and Pontius Pilate were Caesar’s servants – and yet, the Lord used them as His instruments. Yes, Pontius Pilate had Jesus put to death – but that is for your good – for your salvation! Yes, all the Roman rulers exercised authority over God’s people – but the peace provided by the Roman empire allowed the Gospel to be widely spread after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Regardless of who wins the election – regardless of who we call “President” – they too are God’s servants, His instruments, through which the Lord is at work for your good.

That is why Romans 13 says – “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God ... for he [the governing authority] is God’s servant for your good.”

The Pharisees come to Jesus (who is THE Servant of God) – for the sole purpose of tempting Him, trapping Him, discrediting His authority, and getting Him out of the way once and for all. You remember that after the devil tempted Jesus in the wilderness – “he left Him until an opportune time.”

This is an opportune time. The devil is at work through his instruments (the Pharisees) to tempt and trap Jesus – to keep Him from His salvific work. They butter Him up with flattery, and then set the trap – “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”

Jesus knows their devilish plan. He side-steps the trap – not answering their question – because that’s not the point. They want Jesus to be partisan – to pick a side – to answer “yes” or “no” – but that’s not the point!

Jesus unmasks their polarization with His response – “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” The Lord God Almighty is the Creator and Ruler of all. All authority belongs to Him. And He gives His authority to His servants – so that through them – He might be at work for your good!

Through the civil authorities God is at work to punish the evildoers and to commend those who do good – so that all might live in peace. In this peace, His Church flourishes – and there He is at work through His servants and His authoritative Word and Sacraments – to do you good – namely, to forgive your sins, rescue you from death and the devil, and give eternal life to all who believe His Word.

Sixteen days away – and the world seems to be going to hell in a handbasket – and yet, the Lord is still your Keeper – your Protector, Ruler and Guide. He is, and will always remain, your Savior.

So, what does this mean? What does it mean for us in 2020 to “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesars, and to God the things that are God’s”? First of all, let me remind you that this is an opportune time for the devil – he never lets a crisis go to waste – and you can be sure that he will be at work to separate you from God.

To render to God the things that are God’s is to recognize that He is the one who establishes the governing authorities – who authorizes them to punish the evildoer and to commend those who do good – and who is at work through them as His servants.

The devil, however, tempts you to reject this truth – to reject God’s working for your good. You look at what’s going on, and you’re tempted to say – “this is not good” – there is no way God can be at work through the governing authorities.

You render to God the things that are God’s when you don’t look to the governing authorities as your Savior. They are charged by God to provide you with temporal, earthly peace – but they cannot give you the peace of God which surpasses all human understanding. They are to be your servants – but they do not shed holy, precious blood to atone for all your sin.

To render to God the things that are God’s is to believe and do what He says to you in Romans 13. “Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.” Simply put, you honor God – to whom all honor is due – when you honor His representatives.

To render to God the things that are God’s is to see how He is uniquely at work in and through His Church – by the Gospel – to save you, in Christ Jesus His Son. You give honor and glory to God when you, a sinner, lift up your eyes to Jesus, from whom your help comes – when you gladly hear His Word and believe it – when you hunger and thirst for Christ’s Body and Blood, as the source of your salvation.

Dearly beloved, you give all glory, honor and praise to the one true God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – when you see that He is at work in all things, for your good – now, and forevermore. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.