

29TH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR

Isaiah 45:1, 4-6 *1 Thessalonians 1:1-5* *Matthew 22:15-21*

HOMILY

Today's gospel, with its famous "*Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's*" drives home the historic Caesar-God Contest. The story of the Christian West is largely a history of this conflict between religion and the state.

For the first few centuries of its existence, Christianity was fiercely persecuted by the state - leaving behind a bloody trail of martyrs.

MIDDLE AGES:

In the Middle ages, however, it was religion that had power over the state. The rise of the Holy Roman Empire as initiated by Charlemagne gave religion an upper hand. We see Pope John XII crowning Otto I as emperor in 962. It means that the boot was on the other foot to the extent that at Canossa, an excommunicated emperor knelt in the snow and humbly submitted to a pope of the day to regain his imperial crown.

FRENCH REVOLUTION

The French Revolution May 1789 – Nov 1799 marked a decisive turning point in favour of the state again in this 'Caesar – God Contest'. Napoleon made the point dramatically, when he took the imperial crown from the pope and placed it on his own head, becoming the first emperor of France. Ever since the state has been clawing back the ground once claimed by the church. And the church has ceded its former influence reluctantly. The boot has changed feet once more.

Where are we now with the Caesar-God contest?

The opposing claims of God and State are left to be decided by an informed conscience of an individual. We live in a world of pluralism. Christian principles cannot be forced on the state just as much as the Law of the Koran cannot be imposed on any state.

But the state on her part must respect people's beliefs.

Today, the Catechism of the Catholic Church points out three circumstances where citizens are obliged in conscience to refuse obedience to the civil authorities.

These circumstances are when the laws of the state are contrary

- a) to the moral order,
- b) to the fundamental rights of persons and
- c) to the teachings of the gospel."

The role of the church is to advise believers on the obligation of Christian behaviour in all circumstances regarding responsibilities to Caesar and responsibilities to God. No matter how deeply we hold our convictions we must never resort to intimidation or imposition of any kind. There are others whose principles and beliefs differ radically from ours. Our only resort is persuasion. Persuasion is always a gentle art. We best persuade by living our Christian lives to the full. This is the call of each one of us!