

Ahh yes, it is that time of year...

It is getting close to Election Day...

not a Presidential Election...

but a very important one, none the less...

Here in Illinois we are voting for our Governor, a Senator

Congressmen and women and a whole variety of State offices,

including Attorney General and Comptroller...

Now...don't get nervous...I'm not getting political on you...

I would like to reflect, though,

on the intersection of our dual citizenships:

citizens in the Reign of Heaven and citizens of the United States...

Apparently, considering our reading today,

the question of the intersection of faith and politics is not a new one!

Jesus and the people of his day struggled with that very question as well ...

The Jews understood Yahweh to be their King and ruler, not Caesar.

But they were an occupied people,

subject to extraordinarily heavy taxation and slave like working conditions...

all to benefit the Roman Empire.

And...the demands and expectations of their Faith were also heavy and burdensome...

they didn't have just 10 commandments and a few other laws...

Ordinary Jews were expected to abide by and follow to the letter...

613 commandments that dictated where they slept, what they ate, with whom they ate,

what clothes they could wear and many, many other details in the daily lives...

Now...you need to know, as well...that during the time of Jesus

Jews were not supposed to be carrying the coins

bearing only the image of the emperor his titles which gave him political honor

and divine status.

Yes, the Roman Emperor was considered divine...son of the gods.

You could understand why the Jews would resist his position of authority over them.

Not only was he politically oppressive,

but he was religiously offensive, to say the least

Yet, if the Jews resisted too much...they were punished by death.

They walked a very narrow tight rope between death and life

faith and heresy...

The Pharisees, of course, knew this.

As the reading states: the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him.

If Jesus supported paying the taxes to Rome,

then his Jewish followers would reject him for his treason to Yahweh...

If he advised them to resist Roman taxation...

the Romans could kill him for his treason to Rome...

A perfect set up to get rid of the nuisance, so they thought...

but of course, Jesus, that sly one, out maneuvered their deviousness..

First of all, he calls them out on their hypocrisy:

Those coins that I spoke about and are mentioned in the reading...

the ones with the image of Caesar on them...

an observant Jew would not have one in their pocket...

the mere fact that Jesus asked for one

was evidence that he didn't...

that he was an obviously observant Jew...

the fact that the Pharisees' disciples had one....

Right then and there, without him saying another word

everyone could see their hypocrisy and their deviousness...

and then Jesus continues to astutely walked that tight rope between allegiance to Yahweh and obedience to Rome...

“Give to Rome what belongs to Rome and Give to God what belongs to God.”

**Jesus wasn't being foolish nor was he being wishy-washy
he was being wise and faithful...**

God does not benefit by money, as Rome does.

A few gold coins...or even hundreds of gold coins means nothing to the Holy One...

**What matters to Yahweh, Jesus teaches, is your
your fidelity and your open, compassionate, loving heart.....**

**Yahweh asks for your willingness to forgive and to include,
to be kind and to be generous...**

Yahweh asks for much more than money...

the Holy One asks for your Love made visible in your life....

This is the genius of Jesus!

He's not some head in the clouds, pious but irrelevant preacher...

For him it is all about feeding the hungry and clothing the naked...

**He's much more concerned that the lonely be comforted
and the excluded be included, than any Temple or Courtly taxation...**

**If you must, in order to save your life, pay the taxes, Jesus says...
but do not give your heart to Caesar ...**

So what does this all mean to us this November 4th?

As I see it

we must follow our heart

that has been formed and informed by the teachings
and the Love of Christ....

Of course, it is about fiscal policies, regulations and laws...
we belong to a nation with millions of people,
but it isn't only about fiscal policies, regulations and laws...
As followers of Christ, compassion and mercy
ought to have influence as well....

which candidates feed the children?
which candidates help the sick to find health care?
which candidates give voice to those who have no one to speak for them?

I realize these questions do not have simple, clear cut answers...
there are a variety of opinions and solutions...
no one, I believe, wants to see starving children...
no one intentionally wants people to be homeless
no one wants anyone to go to prison unjustly...

But, I think what Jesus is asking of us when he tells:
“Give to Rome what belongs to Rome and Give to God what belongs to God.”

is to look deeply in our hearts and let compassion, and mercy and kindness
and generosity be our
guide and then.....place our vote.

Each of us must walk that tightrope for our self...
Each of us is invited to ponder, to pray and then vote....
It's as simpleAND as complicated as that...

amen.