

**TWENTY NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (10/18-19/2008)**

*Isaiah 45/1-6, Psalm 96, 1 Thessalonians 1/1-5, Matthew 22/15-21*

It won't be long now; soon and very soon, there will be a whole new group of leaders in the White House.

Throughout the presidential campaign, we have heard a lot about church and state issues and how they interface.

What part, if any, should religion play in government?

What part should a particular candidate's religion play in his or her approach to government?

Back in the first century, Jesus was questioned about that very same point.

We know from the *Acts of the Apostles* and from the various letters of Paul and others that those disciples left behind by Jesus would have their own share of trouble with civil authorities.

So, if the issue hasn't and won't go away, how do we deal with it.

Jesus comes up with a sensible, but not necessarily original, proposal.

When shown a Roman coin, he asked the providers of that coin whose inscription was on it.

"*Caesar's,*" they replied.

Jesus said in turn, "*Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.*"

Makes sense.

There's a place for faith and a place for civil government.

They need not be opposed to each other.

Yet, faith, belief in God, has a most important role to play in the public sector.

The prophet Isaiah hints at it.

He speaks for God and says of the Persian ruler, Cyrus: "*I (God) have called you by your name, giving you a (your) title, though you knew me not.*"

In the end, all authority comes from God, the creator of this universe.

Civil officials participate in that mandate of God's to shepherd this world, its people and its resources.

When those officials do so with reasonable justice and mercy, then the people of faith must support and encourage them.

If, on the other hand, public stewardship is despotic or dishonest or unjust, then the people of faith must speak up and exercise every means at their disposal to bring justice and mercy on to the playing field.

A wise person once said that the cost of freedom is eternal vigilance.

We people of faith must participate in and exercise that eternal vigilance.

Not because we are political busy-bodies, with nothing else to do but keep tabs of the actions of the politicians.

We do so because we too share in God's mandate: "*God blessed them saying: 'Be fertile and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it.'*"

That is not permission to misuse this earth or its people, but to exercise stewardship and care.

Church and state alike, we are called to obey this most important command of the Lord.