

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio
Vigil for Life, Closing Mass
24 January 2020
(Jas.3:13-8; Mt. 22:15-21)



Coins are a sign of sovereignty. The Holy See made quite an effort when the Euro was created to make sure that the Vatican could continue to coin money. In this morning's Gospel Jesus uses the image on a coin—and notice that the Pharisees had Roman coins in their possession—to make a statement about the civil and spiritual realms. Useful for us in this context to ask whose image is etched on our hearts?

If we can honestly say that it is the image of Christ, then we are emboldened to go forward in His Name. We have kept vigil so as to march with His message and attest always and everywhere to the dignity of the human person from conception to natural death, to the evil of taking innocent human life in abortion, and to pray for those who are ignorant of the value of human life.

You know that in the life of Jesus, a night of prayer always preceded the decisive moments of His life: public ministry, calling of the Apostles, journey to Jerusalem, passion and death. It was a time of intense communion with the Father. We could say with St. James that it was a time to separate earth-bound wisdom from that whose origins are from above.

St. James tells us this morning that divine wisdom leads to harmony whereas earthly wisdom leads to discord. Wisdom and faith are woven together to form a garment which covers the whole person and offers warmth.¹ Faith also keeps us vigilant so that we are able to see beyond an earthly justice so tied to the struggle for rights and embrace the justice that comes from God alone.

¹ Cf. Zevini and Cabra, *Lectio Divina*, 5, p. 290.

Today you and I render a service to the Nation we love in an authentic act of patriotism, because we march to attest to the dignity of the human person and the duty of the State to protect and foster that dignity. It is an innate dignity, because the human person is created in the image and likeness of God. We can paraphrase Tertulian's comment on this Gospel passage by saying that we give the State a coin, but we give God our very selves in gratitude for His gift of life.

The problem behind today's Gospel passage still plagues us. What is the relationship between faith and the political life? What is the role of the Church in civil society? Can we as the Body of Christ address the problems of everyday life? Why does the Bishop of Rome send representatives to some 183 Nations throughout the world—including our own?

Why is he so concerned about world peace? Would it not be better to leave the issues of civil life and social questions to the governments of the world?

The questions are valid. The Pharisees, the Herodians, and other groups with conflicting ideas asked Jesus the same questions. Every time a bishop or a priest speaks about social justice: we can hear a similar refrain: they are interfering in the political system or attempting to force creedal values in the public sphere.

Let us remember that the believer is charged to be the leaven of the Gospel in our world. We have been scented with the fragrance of Chrism so as to fill the world with the pleasing aroma of the Gospel. All of us are charged in his or her own way to propose the message of the Gospel in every corner of the world. That is a part of our baptismal mandate.

In May of 1988 I listened as St. John Paul II told the diplomatic corps, government, and the dictator of Paraguay, Alfredo Stroessner: "No se puede arrinconar a la Iglesia en sus templos, como no se puede arrinconar a Dios en la conciencia de los hombres." (The Church cannot be confined to her temples, nor is it possible to relegate God to a corner in human consciences.)²

The Lord's words this morning place the question at the level of the relationship between God and the human person. He moves the argument from the theoretical to the practical and reserves the first place for the faith-filled decision regarding our relationship to God. The two spheres are distinct, but interrelated.

Therefore, we sincerely want to find the will of God in every aspect of our lives. At the end of the day when we examine our conscience, we want to be certain that we have given to God what is His. He has placed a law in our hearts and we believe that this natural law must also have its place in our civil society. St. John Paul II reminded us of the charge to make the good news known: "... we must never be ashamed of the Gospel and never be afraid of proclaiming that we are Christians, hiding our faith. Instead we must

² St. John Paul II, Address in the Palacio Lopez, 2, 16.V.1988.

continue to speak to extend the spaces for proclaiming salvation, because Jesus has promised to be with us forever and He is always in the midst of his disciples.”³

The Gospel has called us to our responsibility before Almighty God for our public and private decisions. Giving to Cesar and to God is not quite as simple as it seems, because our lives are not lived in compartments, but are intermingled in many aspects. Believing and acting go together in the life of the human person. Let us accept, then, as free women and men, the political commitments which are born from the very mission entrusted by God to the human person.

Consequently, in a few hours we will march in the tradition of this country, but also as a reminder that life is a pilgrimage which leads to life without end. We are responsible for completing that pilgrimage in faithful observance of the commandments. We are also responsible for helping our brothers and sisters complete their pilgrimage in response to the divine will.

Our march today then is at the service of humanity as was our prayer last night. We do so on the Memorial of St. Francis de Sales, a great bishop right after the Reformation who was never permitted to visit the seat of his diocese in Geneva, Switzerland. Yet he prayed for those who kept him out and he sought their sanctification. As he wrote: “It is an error, or rather a heresy, to wish to banish the devout life from the regiment of soldiers, the mechanic's shop, the court of princes, or the home of married people. ... Wherever we may be, we can and should aspire to the perfect life.”⁴

Finally, beyond the events of today, we recommit ourselves to one more civic service: to demonstrate our respect for life by our politeness and civility to all. Yes, we march to protect the unborn and the aged, but our demonstration of the dignity of the human person extends beyond a single day or a single issue. When you and I treat another with respect—even if we disagree, we witness to that person's dignity. We profess silently a fundamental truth: you are created by God, you have inestimable value. We cannot fail to listen to and welcome others.

Protecting life in the womb moves us out of our comfort zone this morning, but we affirm the value of that life every time we treat another with respect, because we are saying you have value. You are irreplaceable and I recognize the image and likeness of God in you.

Gathered in this magnificent shrine to the Immaculate Conception we pray with Pope Francis who urges us to “say “Yes” to life and not death... Let us ask Mary, Mother of Life, to help us receive and bear constant witness to the ‘Gospel of Life’”.⁵

When we do so every time and every day, we reflect the image of Christ etched on our hearts and we bring Him to others. We thus recognize the need for God and follow the

³ St. John Paul II, Message for the World Day of Missions, 2002, 6.

⁴ St. Francis de Sales, *The Devout Life*, 6.

⁵ Pope Francis, Homily celebrating *Evangelium Vitae*, 16.VI.2013, n. 3.

road which leads to Jesus, the incarnate Word. Can there be a more effective way of giving witness to our faith? To the value of life? To the protection of life in the womb?