



# Allocutio



Presentata Curia 23rd October 2014

Allocutio: “Render to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s”

The Pope last Sunday mentioned that the words of our Lord, “Render to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s” is one of the best known one liners of Our Lord.

It is right that we be engaged with Caesar. Was the budget wise to have loosened the grips a bit or has the government made a bad mistake because it wanted to win votes? While water freely falls in Ireland do we still have to pay for the maintenance of reservoirs and improving the quality of the water and the pipes that deliver it and if so what is a fair deal? Yes it is right to get involved with Caesar.

But we also need to stand back and not forget a bigger picture. I quote Shakespeare: “The world is all a stage and all the men and women in it merely actors. We have our exits and our entrances”. Yes we are part of something so much greater than what is going on today. Our science has shown us that the world we live in goes way back and it is so vast. I was born into something already there, something evolving. But what is it, this great movement of time and history that is too big for our small minds. Yes, we need also to render to God what is his due: praise and wonder. “When I see the heavens, the work of your hands what is man that you keep him in mind” (Ps 8). “I thank you Lord for the wonder of my being” (Ps 139).

The first reading last Sunday dealt with a king who was not the worst. God reminds him at the same time of a great truth: “Though you do not know me I am the real boss!” That was illustrate for me by a case I read a few years ago. Scientists were struck by the remains of a temple and city somewhere in Central America which had obviously been a prosperous place of civilisation. But there was also clear proof that for some reason the kingdom there had suddenly ended. What happened? Upon research it was found that a drought had ended it. The king of that society had a very good administration, he had a well-drilled army, had coppers and more to spare in his treasury. But he had no means of coping with a drought that lasted years. What good is it when you have no water? No food, no water, people fled and the king may have had to go and grovel before some other king hundreds of miles away so he could even have a slave’s existence. Again let us thank God for our blessings and never forget that bigger picture: we depend on God for everything.

To drought you can add earthquakes, and meteorites. If they could wipe out the dinosaurs what might they do to us? But now we have another great reminder that we must render to God. Ebola, disease. I know that we may get control of it, that drugs to combat it may be on the way and that we have medical services here in Ireland and Europe that have held up so far. But is it not a reminder that we are not in control? If it is not Ebola it may be the next disease. It is worth reflecting that if some disease comes to our country that is



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like Ebola, and suppose that that for each person infected two more get infected, that like Ebola it is transmitted on average every 25 days, then within two years everyone on this island will have got it. Just do the maths and you'll see.

Yes we must render to the Caesar of science and medicine due thanks. Many of us would not have lived this long without the great contributions made. But Ebola reminds us that there is something so much bigger out there and we do well to kneel and acknowledge how small we are, how limited, how vulnerable and ask God for protection and help. By the way Ebola may not kill anyone on this island this year or next. But many other bugs will as they become more resistant to antibiotics. There is something greater than all our powers out there. Death! None of us will escape death.

That might be depressing were it not for what our faith lifts us with. Our Lady is always pointing us to Heaven. Her son came into our world to share with us the ups and downs of the human journey. Every step we take in life Jesus and Mary walk with us because they have already been there. And Jesus will walk through death with us, close to us, comforting us and bringing us safely through as he has already done. His Resurrection points to a great future for us all, a future to be revealed to all those who kept going in faith and who loved and deepened their love on the way.

What I have said today is simply to point out that the Gospel is as relevant as ever. We are not the bosses. God is. And things like Ebola are allowed by God to keep us in our place. We are tiny against the backdrop of all, we are very vulnerable. It is to God we must look and in whom we must place out trust.

Those who have given their lives in Africa in confronting Ebola have already inspired us. I end with a quote from Pope Paul VI, now Blessed. He said, "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses. St. Peter expressed this well when he held up the example of a reverent and chaste life that wins over even without a word those who refuse to obey the Word. It is therefore primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelise the world . . ."

Amen.

Fr Paul Churchill