

# Church of the Good Shepherd and St. John the Evangelist

23 Pentecost  
October 19, 2008  
Fr. Bill McGinty

## **“Walking in the Glory of God!”**

Today’s Gospel is about right and wrong. “Is it lawful to pay taxes to the Emperor or not?” This is the question the scribes and Pharisees put to Jesus. It is of course a two edged question. If Jesus answers “yes”, he will upset his fellow Jews; if “no” then they will run to the Roman Governor and say: “This man says we should not pay taxes to Caesar.”

This was not a new question. More than likely it was a question that teachers annually put to their students in rabbinic school. What is unusual is Jesus’ answer.

Questions about right and wrong are questions we ask ourselves every day. We are people who are capable of making moral decisions. It is a built in facility that we possess. It is what distinguishes us from every other animal on the planet; the ability to tell right from wrong.

In election years, politicians feel that it is their place to state their position on ethical issues of the day and convince us of that position. But truly it is not. Right and wrong cannot be decided by whether you are conservative or liberal. If something is intrinsically wrong then it is wrong for all time. Nor can decisions about right and wrong be made for us by the Bible alone. Otherwise Cain is just as likely to tell God ‘killing my brother is okay, because the 10 commandments have not been written yet.’ So, we left with the question all Christians must ask themselves:

“Are things right because God says so? Or does God say them because they are right?”

The truth is that there is a wrong and a right and in most cases we know precisely what it is. Oh we may get rid of that sense of ‘knowing’ if we ignore it long enough, but deep down it is still there. At times people want to make exceptions to allow for special cases. They will present sociological arguments for why murder is not really murder or theft is not really theft, but this is only smoke and mirrors. What has happened is that after they have asked themselves the question: “What is right or wrong, they have followed up by asking: “Even if I know what is right or wrong why should I do it?”

Many people make up the answer to that question by looking at the consequences. You go to jail; you get a fine; you increase your insurance; you get the electric chair; you wreck your health; you lose your reputation.

Many politicians want us to believe that it is good or bad consequences that make an action right or wrong. They tell us: “If it don’t hurt anyone, it must be good, if it hurts me or others it has to be bad.”

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“If you are coming up 209 at 2AM in the morning can you run the red light at the Dingman’s Ferry intersection and is it okay?” The answer is that it is not okay, but you decide to do it anyway.

The IRS sends you a check for \$250,000 when you were expecting a refund of \$250. You leave it sitting in the bank for three years and nothing happens. Does that make it okay? Do not smile and nod your head. It is not okay, no more than it is okay for a board of directors of a failing company to award itself vast sums of money, just before the business goes under.

We are moral decision making agents. No one can take that ability away from us, unless we let them. All we need do is inform ourselves of the facts and use our God given powers of reason. In that regard our faith, our bible, our church, our parents and our friends and family can help because they give us a context, an environment where we can love and grow those skills.

Yesterday, as we were walking the Walkathon several of us were discussing why morality and knowing about ‘right and wrong’, seems to have disappeared from the younger generation. We pondered why? Were there things our grandparents and parents taught us that were of such value that they forever remained with us? Or did the sixties and seventies simply breed a generation that had thrown out all the rules?

Reading John’s Gospel the Evangelist tells us that to follow Christ is to raise our decision making about right and wrong to a whole new level. For, John says, “Jesus tells us that in all that we do, love must be the deciding factor. If we make all our decisions based on love, then we will live in a more human world, where hate, greed and violence have no place. Deciding not to respond in kind to being provoked, insulted or abused, but instead responding with love, patience and Christian forgiveness would seem to be a high and nobler calling.

However, turning the other cheek has always worried me, especially given our Celtic tendency towards escalating violence, even when playing poker or bridge. Jesus’ great commandment, that we find in John Chapter 15, “To love others as we would have expected to be loved,” works for most parts of our lives. Yet, growing up in the aftermath of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, it was for me never quite complete. After all, we tried being nice to Hitler, it just didn’t work, before he marched into Czechoslovakia and Poland. In the end the rows of white crosses that splatter the Normandy landscape speak of a different kind of love. It is a love that says: “Greater love than this has no man than he lays down his life for his friends.”

Maybe this too, is what Jesus meant that something good is worth living for, is also worth dying for. Christians across America have a moral obligation to vote this November. How

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they vote and who they vote for is entirely up to them. But vote we must and vote we should. On the other side of the world young men and women go out each day to protect liberties that we enjoy and to protect the loved ones that we cherish.

Sometimes hate, war, violence calls us to a higher love. Sometimes we are forced to look at a bigger picture. Right and wrong are never easy. As Christians we have in the days ahead a role to play in praying for our country, for our people and for their future. We are a country divided. We are a country with people that are hurting. Through our prayer, kindness and generosity of spirit; let us reach out to begin a healing process, where it is so badly needed. Let us pray for those who don't share our views. Let us pray that the great experiment that Adams and Jefferson began some 200 years ago will go on in a spirit of national fellowship. Let us pray for an America, that her best days be still ahead and that she responds to the best her people can offer.

At times when we talk about moral decay in the world in which we live, this passage of Moses in Exodus conversing with God comes to mind. Yes, at times we have lost a sense of the glory of God. Moses says: "Show me your glory and I will make all my goodness pass before you and proclaim your name."

That is our task, to proclaim the glory and the goodness of our God. To see that goodness reflected in the best of who we are. To walk out into the beauty of our Milford Fall and see the glory of God arrayed in the magnificence of the color of autumn.

With that sense of awe we can sing *Amazing Grace* and truly mean it. We can live lives of wonder and expect the grace of our God to give us his blessings. Most of all we can learn to love and love more completely.

Amen+

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