

“Are you dangerous? Yes!” Mark 12:13-17

“And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk. And they came and said to him, “Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone’s opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?” But, knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, “Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.” And they brought one. And he said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” They said to him, “Caesar’s.” Jesus said to them, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” And they marvelled at him.”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Today we celebrated Australia Day. Thanks be to God for this country! It is fitting and right from time to time to reflect on some of the earthly gifts that we may not usually consider and appreciate.

Let’s reflect on **the gift of the country** where we live in, **the gift of government** that keeps our society ticking and orderly, and **on our ultimate authority** – on something that makes Christians potentially dangerous people.

Land, country, place, Australia... We are blessed people to live here. We are. Difficult to argue against it. There are so many blessings of our daily bread that our good Creator Father so generously provides for us.

Just as Dr Luther so joyfully reminds to us in the Small Catechism: **“I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul [...] in addition, clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and homestead, spouse and children, fields, cattle, and all my goods.”**

Basically, everything that belongs to the support and needs of the body. However, regardless of how many gifts and blessings our Father provides for our daily lives, we have been given this place and this time to live not only for the sake of enjoying our daily bread, we are created and destined for much more than that.

There is a greater purpose, why the Almighty guides different nations to live in different places at different times. We could say - the purpose of our lives, of the lives of every human being, of every nation, of every tribe and language.

Do you know what it is? Paul the apostle summarized it in his famous address to the intelligentsia in Athens: **“He [our Triune God] made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward Him and find Him. Yet He is actually not far from each one of us.”** (Acts 17:26-27)

This is it! To seek God and to find Him, for He is not far from each one of us. This is why we have allotted periods and boundaries for our dwelling place. This is why

nations exist. And if we pursue this purpose, if we faithfully obey the voice of the Lord our God, striving to keep all His commandments ... then we can look with joyful anticipation to the promises given to those faithful to the Triune God.

As we read in Deuteronomy, He will set us high above all the nations of the earth, that blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field, and blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground.

He will bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. The Lord will establish you as a people holy to Himself – if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in His ways. Isn't this wonderful?!

This promise was first given to the nation of Israel, but it also reveals our God's generous heart to us. So, yes, this is why we live in this place at this time. To respond to God's invitation, to listen and obey Him so that He can pour His bountiful blessings, earthly and eternal ones, all over us. That's why we have received the gift of our country, the gift of Australia. Thanks be to God!

However, it would be impossible to receive and enjoy all those blessings without that other gift, remember - **the gift of government**. Again, as Luther mentions it in the Catechism, our daily bread also includes "**pious and faithful magistrates, good government and peace**".

And when our God "**protects us from all danger, and guards us and preserves us from all evil**" – that is not about spiritual protection only, He does protect and guard and preserve us by means of His servants, the governing authorities.

The gift of the governing authorities... Do we usually think about our government as a gift? I think quite often we have this habit to be dissatisfied, to cringe and complain about our governments.

And to be fair, those people in positions of authority often give us plenty of reasons for that. But do you know what is much, much worse than the worst government? Can you guess? Yes, the absence of any government. The chaos.

The anarchy. When everyone can do whatever is good in their own eyes. From time to time, we receive sober reminders of what it looks like. When some disasters disrupt our regular life and there is no one to keep us accountable.

Terrible things happen... As many wise people have observed, it takes only a few steps, as few fatal events before peaceful and orderly civilization, as we know it, may collapse into utter chaos and violence. Isn't that a frightening thought?

And what keeps us from descending into chaos? Yes, our governments! As Paul wrote in Romans – "**for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God... For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad; the one who is in authority is God's servant for our good.**" (Romans 13:1, 3)

When we see that our governing authorities are faulty and fail us and don't live up to our expectations, we, Christians, of all people should be gracious towards them, for we have a very realistic view on human beings, we know that the same sin dwells in

each one of us, we all suffer from the same deadly condition, no one is better than others when God examines our hearts.

Knowing that we all are fallen creatures, and on the other hand, being able to appreciate the absolute necessity for governing authorities, we should joyfully take up the advice of the Holy Spirit gives us:

“I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.” (1 Tim 2:1-2) Let’s never forget to pray for those in authority! For they are God’s gift to us.

Here we come to the third point, to the question about **our ultimate authority**. This is where we can see why Christians are potentially dangerous people. Yes, dangerous! Why are we dangerous, you may wonder?

For one, God’s wisdom gives us these clear and penetrating insights into human nature. Fallen human nature. We know that much authority, that much power has this scary potential to corrupt us, our characters.

People in authority may begin to think that they are more than they are. Not servants, but masters. That is especially true for those with great power. I think we have witnessed enough of that during the last few years.

Especially frightening is to see great power in the hands of those who do not fear God, who believe that they themselves are like gods. Not accountable to anyone. 20th century history teaches us what such people may be capable of...

There is yet another angle, if people do not trust the true God, they will search for His substitutes. The obvious powerful candidate is – government. Then people start believing that the government must and will solve all their problems, and will provide everything they need for their daily bread, and all the protection.

When these two trends meet, governments tend to expand their influence more and more, they want to regulate more and more and demand unconditional obedience threatening with punishments and fines.

This is why Christians have been always considered dangerous people by those governments that are hostile to Christian way of life. Why are we dangerous? Because we don’t believe that governments have the ultimate authority.

This is exactly what Jesus talks about in our today’s Gospel reading. Jesus was asked the masterfully framed question about government: **“Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”** Pharisees thought they had trapped Jesus.

If He answered “yes”, He could be discredited in the eyes of those who believed that He may be their long-awaited Messiah, the Saviour. If He replied with “no”, He could be accused before Roman authorities as inciting a rebellion.

However, Jesus’ answer took His opponents by surprise. He asked them to give Him a coin. **“Whose likeness and inscription is this?” They said to Him, “Caesar’s.”** Jesus

said to them, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

What is Jesus saying? Yes, obey the governing authorities in matters where they are servants of God. Do it diligently. But also use your God given and sanctified reason to discern what is according to God’s will and what is not.

Remember, that you do not belong to the governing authorities, and on the Last Day you won’t be asked: “Did you obey your government in everything?” No, you will be asked: “Did you listen and obey my Commandments?”

As Peter so famously said when pressured by the government officials to act against God’s will: **“We must obey God rather than men.”** (Acts 5:29) For all governments are here as servants of God. If the servant commands something that is against the Master’s will, we must obey the Master, rather than the servant.

As it has always been the case, all around the world different anti-Christian ideologies have taken societies captives. Waving rainbow flags and rallying for love and choice and freedom and equality God’s beautiful design for humanity and our most important relationships, marriage and family is being systematically erased.

Millions and millions of unborn children are being murdered every year, bodies of teenagers, confused by seducing voices, are being irreversibly mutilated, societies are forced to deny the obvious that there are only two sexes, male and female, hate speech laws stifle the freedom of speech and God’s way is constantly under attack.

So, yes, Christians can be dangerous people, very dangerous, because in God’s wisdom we are among the first to discern what is going on and among the first to stand against what is wrong. Jesus Christ was considered so dangerous that He had to be crucified. Except it didn’t work out. He rose again. As **“Lord of lords and King of kings”**. To Him all authority is given in heavens and on earth.

He is our ultimate authority. Jesus Christ. And by God’s unfathomable grace, He is also our brother. Now you too belong to Him. He has purchased you. He has freed you from slavery to any hostile ruler and authority, He has made you His own, not paying with perishable things like gold or silver, but with His precious blood.

Now, you are His own. He cares for you. He is faithful to His own till death. He will stand with His own till the end, and He will bring His own to be with Him, and to reign with Him forever. That is something to remember and cherish.

Thus, we shall pray today – thanks be to God for the gifts of our land and our country and our governing authorities! Let’s give them what is due to them and let us pray sincerely for them, and let us joyfully give to God what is His!

That is – your own self, your heart and allegiance, your mind and soul, your love and trust. For remember and never forget – you are created in God’s own image and His likeness and it is the Triune God’s name that is written on you. You are His own.

Glory be to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit!

Amen.