

My Brothers and Sisters,

In today's reading from Isaiah, God said to King Cyrus, "*I have called you by your name, giving you a title, though you knew me not.*" Cyrus, the king of Persia, unlike many conquerors, was not ruthless. "His faith (Zoroastrianism) and his political foresight made him broad-minded, and he came to exiled Judah as a **liberator rather than a conqueror**. Within a short time of his occupation of Babylon, Cyrus issued the edict" allowing the Israelites to return from Exile and rebuild the temple.<sup>1</sup> In other words, God specifically chose King Cyrus to restore the people of Israel and to rebuild the temple.

We believe that God calls each of us by name. Since our name is a symbol of ourselves, it is a symbol of our uniqueness and individuality. If God calls us by name, this means that God knows and loves us as unique individuals. Knowing us and loving us as unique individuals, God calls forth the best in each of us. As Matthew Kelly has written, God has an incredible dream for each and every one of us: he wants us to become the-best-version-of-ourselves. He wants us to become holy. This is our fundamental vocation.

However, God also has a plan for each of us. God calls each of us to make a contribution to the common good of the Church and the larger community. As St. Paul wrote, "*To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good*" [I Cor. 12:7; NAB, 1970]. In other words, God has given us, directly or indirectly through others, unique gifts, talents, and abilities to build up the Church and the larger community. We do this by all the ways we participate in the Church, all the ways we participate in the larger community, especially in our jobs or careers. Our challenge is discerning God's call in our lives.

In today's Gospel, in response to the question whether or not they should pay taxes to Caesar, a sore subject but a question designed to trap him, Jesus said, "*Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.*" I would suggest that Jesus is reminding us that we have responsibilities both to God and to civil society. In blunt terms, what do we owe God and what do we owe civil society? As Catholic Christians, we certainly owe God attendance and participation at Sunday Eucharist, participation in the life of the Christian community, and support of the community and its mission and ministries. As citizens, we certainly have an obligation to pay our taxes and to vote. Finally, I think Jesus is reminding us that we should not see church and state as either/or but both/and.

Finally, in today's reading from his First Letter to the Thessalonians, Paul wrote, "*We give thanks to God always for all of you, remembering you in our prayers....*" Families, friendships, and communities are always complicated and challenging. I would suggest that every night when we pray, we picture each of the important people in our lives and thank God for them. When we are thankful for others, we are less likely to take them for granted and are less likely to allow little things to create walls and barriers between them and us.

My brothers and sisters, God knows and loves each of us as individuals and calls us to become the-best-version-of-ourselves and to make a unique contribution to the communities of which we are part, especially our families, our Church, and our society. At the same time, we need to thank God daily for all the special people in our lives.

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<sup>1</sup>P. Simpson W. F., "Ezra-Nehemiah," *A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, ed. Rev. Reginald Fuller et al., (New York: Thomas Nelson, Inc. Publishers, 1975), 380-396, p. 382.