

Delighted with Thy Commandments Ps. 118:47

Not this one but Barrabbas!... We have no King but Caesar! Sound familiar? These infamous slogans were the “party platform” which condemned our Lord Jesus Christ to death on the Cross. It seems we can hear their echoes today in the speech of certain “Catholic” politicians, and those who support them. They invoke “Caesar's” laws while rejecting The Law of Christ and His Church. What should our attitude be toward God's Law?

O Joy of the blessed you have given your people the Ten Commandments, and in your Gospel have promised happiness to those who do your will. Grant us the blessedness which your love has promised to the holy ones who keep your commandments. Reveal to us the joy and beauty of your treasures. Then we shall direct our steps on the straight path that leads to happiness, and hasten on the way that leads to eternal joy. (From the Maronite Divine Praises)

The Maronite liturgy here reveals for us the beautiful attitude, the Catholic attitude, toward God and His Law. It is one of reverence, love and *obedience*. Notice how the Commandments are linked, as cause and effect, to happiness, on

the one hand, and compared to beautiful treasures on the other. In the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass: *Guide me in your fear, O Lord. Instruct me in your Justice. O King of Heaven, forgive all my sins!* (From the Maronite Divine Liturgy)



Illustration: Maronite Monks

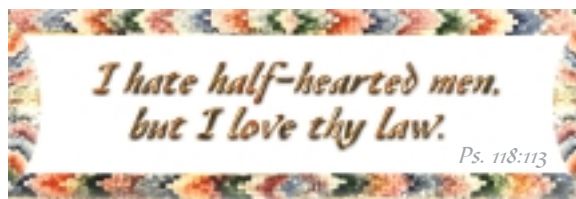
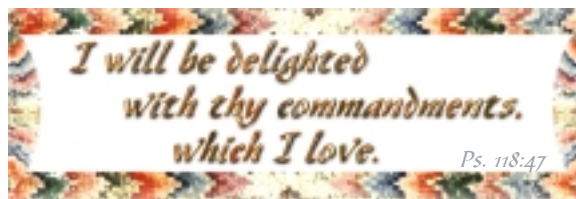
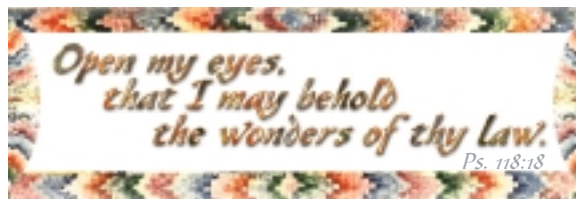
Perhaps too much like the Jews of weak faith in the *1st book of Maccabees* we Catholics have looked to the secular culture around us for the proper attitudes and said, in effect “Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles round about us, for since we separated from them many evils have come upon us.” (1 Mac 1:11) As a consequence, instead of converting the City of Man, we have simply abandoned the City of God *and its laws*.

What, then, does the secular culture have to say about the Law? Not much good. Are not laws and government in general regarded simply as a necessary evil, a regrettable restraint on the exercise of the ultimate secular value: *freedom*? Who is to say, anyway, what is right and what is wrong? I may believe something privately (morality), so the reasoning goes, but who am I to push it on you (law)? Another echo of the much abused “separation of church and state.”

Catholics could counter with very sound arguments, perhaps using the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as inspiration. “**Law is a rule of conduct enacted by a competent authority for the sake of the common good ... All law finds its just and ultimate truth in the eternal law. Law is declared and established by reason as a participation in the providence of the Living God, Creator and Redeemer of all. ‘Such an ordinance of reason is what one calls law.’”** (CCC 1951) “**Man’s freedom is limited and fallible. In fact, man failed. He freely sinned. By refusing God’s plan of love, he deceived himself and became a slave of sin. This first alienation engendered a multitude of others. From its outset, human history attests to the wretchedness and oppression born of the human heart in consequence of the abuse of freedom.**” (CCC 1739) At least this might provoke spirited discussion.

What though about me, about us? What are our attitudes toward the Creator and His plan of salvation for me? How do I relate to His Law? What *would* Jesus do? Let’s look at some answers from Sacred Scripture, the Saints and the Magisterium.

The Psalms are central to Christian liturgy—East and West—and were constantly on the lips of our divine Savior, even during His Passion. Their authority and their influence on Catholic piety, thought and worship can hardly be overestimated. Do they have to say anything about God’s Law? Plenty! Did you know that there is even an entire Psalm (a very long one!) devoted to the beauty, goodness, truth of God’s holy law? In our current Arabic/Syriac Maronite liturgy it figures prominently in Midday Prayer: Psalm 118. “...*I will take pleasure in thy statutes, I will not forget thy words ... open my eyes that I may behold the wonders of thy law...my soul is consumed with longing for thy ordinances at all times...*” Saint David, inspired by the Holy Ghost, continued singing in this vein for one



hundred and seventy six couplets! He continued his hymns to the Law elsewhere, *Psalm 18*, for example: “*The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart ... the judgments of the Lord are true, and wholly just, they are more desirable than gold and much fine gold, and sweeter than honey and the honey comb.*”

Perhaps though, that was appropriate as the modern idiom goes, for King David who lived after all, hundreds of years before the coming of Our Lord and his new law of love. Isn’t the Old Law finished, or at least irrelevant? It would seem not. Here is just a small fraction of what the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches concerning God’s Law, especially the Ten Commandments: ... *following Jesus Christ involves keeping the Commandments. The Law has not been abolished, but rather man is invited to rediscover it in the person of his Master who is its perfect fulfillment ...* (2053) ... *the Tradition of the Church has acknowledged the primordial importance and significance of the Decalogue.* (2064) *The Ten Commandments state what is required in the love of God and neighbor.* (2067)

“If you love me,” Our Saviour said, “keep my commandments.” Long ago, when the rich young man asked what he needed to do to enter eternal life, Our Lord told him “You know the commandments.” Not so long ago—in seeing the terrible state the world had fallen into as a result of its rejection of Christ—our Holy Father, Pope Pius XI, in a letter to the whole church called *Quas Primas*, instituted an important religious feast, one we should all celebrate with especial zeal in our own day: Christ the King. Next month it will be celebrated on the Universal calendar of the Church, while in the Maronite liturgy it is celebrated, virtually, every day: *O King of Heaven, forgive all my sins!*

What about Our King? We know he died a horrible bloody death on Golgotha. In the words of St. Alphonsus de Liguori: “Look at him, O my soul: see him

moving along with his flesh all torn, carrying a crown of thorns on his head and a heavy cross on his shoulders, surrounded by enemies who load him with insults and maledictions...” Why? To save us. Yes, and to make us love Him, who not only saved us but suffered so much out of love for us. As the Son of God He could have stopped the Passion at any moment, but He did not. Why? St. Alphonsus: “...Jesus leaves not the cross; no, He does not leave it, because through it **He wishes, as Isaias foretold, to reign in the hearts of men: And the government is on His shoulders.**” In *Quas Primas* Pope Pius XI seems to elaborate on the truth expressed by St. Alphonsus: “He must reign in our minds which should assent with perfect submission and firm belief to revealed truths and to the doctrines of Christ. He must reign in our wills, which should obey the laws and precepts of God. He must reign in our hearts, which should spurn natural desires and love God above all things



and cling to Him alone. He must reign in our bodies and in our members, which should serve as ... the instruments of justice unto God.” We should all read and study *Quas Primas*! We should remember too that “the Second Coming *will not be like the first.*” (Maronite Divine Praises)

As Pope Pius XI warns us in *Quas Primas*: “[Christ the King] will call to their minds the thought of the last judgment, wherein Christ, who has been cast out of public life, despised, neglected and ignored, will most severely avenge these insults; for His kingly dignity demands that the State should take into account of the commandments of God and of Christian principles, both in making laws and in administering justice.”

Let our “party platform” be the Prayer of St. Bernard: “Come Lord Jesus and reign in me ... I have *no other King* than my Lord, Jesus Christ! ✠