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## LETTER TO THE ROMANS

### “The true fulfillment of the Law”

Rom 13:1-7

*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of him who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain; he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be subject, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.*

Today, we hear Paul instructing the Church of Rome on how to relate to state authority. He emphasizes that the state has been instituted by God and can therefore demand obedience. No one should fear it if they do what is good. The state bears the sword to bring justice to those who do evil. As Christians, we abide by these instructions, bearing in mind that there are limits to obedience when state authorities demand something that goes against our conscience. In such cases, they would be acting arbitrarily and against the law.

In his encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, Pope John XXIII summarizes this teaching as follows:

*“Governmental authority, therefore, is a postulate of the moral order and derives from God. Consequently, laws and decrees passed in contravention of the moral order, and hence of the divine will, can have no binding force in conscience, since ‘it is right to obey God rather than*

*men' (Acts 5:29). Indeed, the passing of such laws undermines the very nature of authority"* (n. 51)

It is important to keep this in mind because we are faced with increasingly anti-Christian legislation that we cannot abide by for the Lord's sake. Let us think, for example, of recent events in the United Kingdom, where a law was passed leaving unborn children without any state protection, as well as many other ungodly laws that govern this world.

Let us continue reading St. Paul's Letter to the Romans:

*"Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law"* (Rom 13:8-10).

St. Paul brings us to the heart of the Christian message. Everything that our most loving Father does flows from the source of His Heart, which loves mankind immeasurably. There is no other motivation for God's actions because there is no shadow in Him. He created everything out of love and carried it to the ultimate consequence by assuming suffering and death to redeem His creation, again moved by this same love.

The Church teaches us this by virtue of the message entrusted to her. Consequently, fulfilling the law consists in transmitting to others the love that God bestows on us. This is what He wants from us because the witness of His love must be carried to the ends of the earth. The world can be transformed when people abandon themselves to God and accept the grace of salvation in Christ. After all, the lack of peace that is to be lamented in this world is due to the non-observance of the divine commandments, for in this way God's love cannot penetrate the hearts of men in order to transform them and make them capable of loving Him and their neighbor.

Finally, St. Paul exhorts the Christian community to shake off all drowsiness and does not leave it in the dark about the points to be observed in the discipleship of Christ:

*“It is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Rom 13:11-14).*

A clear and transparent way of life is essential for the unfolding of the grace entrusted to us. The works of darkness must no longer have power over us. Therefore, we must restrain our passions and avoid nourishing them with a disordered life. This requires vigilance and "putting on the Lord Jesus Christ", which means adopting His way of being and acting and becoming witnesses to His love.

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Meditation on the Gospel of the day: <https://en.elijamission.net/follow-the-call-2/>