Jesus acknowledges in the Gospel a relationship between God and government. It is a relationship that demands decisions. A good government is seen as deriving its power and authority from God. It is a way of promoting the common good in order to better care for people, to help them live better and to protect them.

The Roman government of Jesus day had good points. Governments are good inasmuch as they help promote and support human life. The Roman Empire was known for its roads. The roads improved communication and allowed good communication, like the Gospel, to spread more quickly. It also allowed the Roman armies to move more quickly. Armies and military can be good things when they protect the life and freedom of people.

Like the Roman government of Jesus' day, the United States government of our day has good points. We are called to support our government through taxes in order to provide roads in our own time and location. Roads allow people to get to work safely and quickly in order to care for their families. They allow delivery of life sustaining products like food. Military is needed sometimes and the Church teaches the reality of "just" war in order to protect innocent people and give them life and freedom like the religious freedom that we enjoy here now.

We are called though to reform a government which does not support life. We do that in non-life threatening ways like voting and political action. We should never resort to violence which destroys the human life that God wishes us to promote.

It is worth noting that the Holy Father, John Paul II, was a man who did not live in fear. In fact, his first words as Pope were "Be not afraid." He saw the worst that man can be in Nazi-occupied Poland and Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe, and yet, he was at peace. How did he do it? The pope knew that the worst thing that could ever happen has already happened. God has already been killed. Nothing more horrible than that could ever take place. Yet from that horror, God brought forth an unprecedented gift of eternal life for us all. He still brings forth life from death, for He is alive for evermore. So have courage, be at peace, and remember that God, the Conqueror of Death, is still in control. Be not afraid!

Many people worry that the "worst is yet to come". They fret about the future, watch the stock markets, bite their nails over the headlines and dread what the future may hold. But they are 2,000 years behind the times. For the fact is, the worst thing that could ever happen has happened already. It happened on Good Friday, when God was crucified. And yet even that, the worst thing in the world, was not the end of the story. For God destroyed death from the inside three days later and transformed the grave from a hole to a door. Today, thank God for robbing death of his victory and for giving you eternal life!

Consider an airplane pilot taking off down the runway. Consider a pilot leaving South Bend Airport.

When a pilot is preparing for takeoff he is certainly aware of gravity. However, his focus is not on the gravitational forces. Rather, the pilot is doing all he needs to do and thinking about all he needs to think with regard to getting his plane airborne. He is focused on aerodynamics of speed, lift, currents and the like.

Similarly, God tells us not to worry about the gravitational pull of earthly matters. We certainly have awareness of earthly realities like gravity and the stock market. But we are always to be more focused on the aerodynamics of Sacraments, Scripture and prayer – those things that lift our hearts and minds and souls to God. These are the wind beneath our wings. Don't get too caught up in worldly matters of Caesar but always focus more on heavenly matters with God.

Just as the pilot is not thinking about gravity-management, the Christian life is not to be one of sin-management. The Christian, therefore, is one whose mind ought to be becoming more and more skilled in understanding and operating the aerodynamic features of heavenly motivations (love, peace, Sacraments, Scripture, gratitude, and Christlikeness). He should be much more skilled in knowing the look of compassion and kindness and humility and gentleness and patience than he is in knowing the look of the gravitational factors of fear and anger that pull against these. The issue for the heavenly-minded person is not how to control anger but how to develop mercy. When someone has wronged the heavenly-minded person, his aerodynamic mindset looks for ways to show Christ's love rather than for ways to get even. When that becomes someone's pattern of thinking it is difficult to think that being heavenly-minded is of no earthly good.

As Casey Kasem used to say in his signature sign-off: "Keep your feet on the ground and keep reaching for the stars." Keep your feet on the ground and keep praying to God.

Fr. David Ruppert at St. Anthony de Padua Church, South Bend, Indiana
29th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 2011