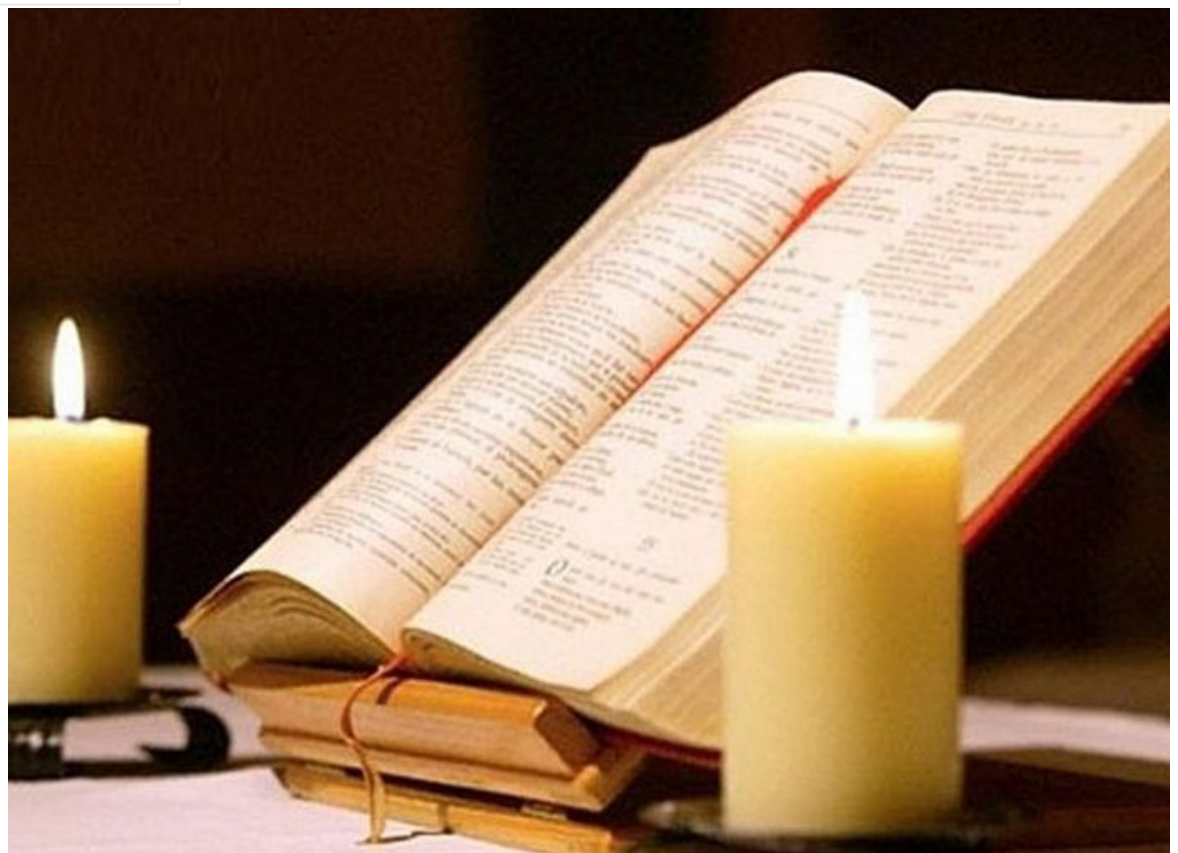


GOSPEL PEARLS

Avoid statolatry

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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 marveled at him. (Mark 12: 13-17)

In order not to fall prey to those who want to entrap Him, Jesus says money is the responsibility of the one whose image it bears. Then, even though they did not ask Him, He immediately refers to God as being more important than Caesar. Christians, therefore, have the first duty to obey God, then the laws of the state and only if they are in conformity with God's own law. Otherwise, we fall into *statolatry* - the idolatry of the state - when we place the state's laws above the Gospel. We must ask the Lord for the strength to be more interested in pleasing Him than men, even if this means being unpopular and facing fines or prison terms.