

HOMILY ~ 29th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

OCTOBER 21/22, 2023

The Pharisees set a trap for Jesus in today's Gospel when they said:

“Teacher, we know that you are a truthful man and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. And you are not concerned with anyone’s opinion, for you do not regard a person’s status.”

We should stop right there for a moment because this one verse itself has a lot of truth in it and a lot of guidance for us as well. Jesus was not concerned with anyone's opinion of him. How much of our lives do we spend trying to win the approval of other people? If we honestly look at our lives, we will probably see many things that we do to look better in other people's eyes. We want to win the approval of our boss, or our parents or the neighbors, etc. We get fresh haircuts, work on a decent wardrobe, get good grades in school, work hard at sports in school or work overtime on a project that is important to the boss. Many of us put our best foot forward in the neighborhood with a manicured lawn or a fresh coat of paint on the house, too. Everything has to be just perfect for the holidays when we have guests over for dinner.

Why do we spend so much of our lives trying to win the approval of others? Jesus did not do this. He also did not care about a person's status in life, their place in society or how much money they had. Jesus also chose uneducated, simple fishermen to be his Apostles, along with a tax collector and a doctor. A thriving Catholic community is also like this. The Second Reading today alluded to this concept, too when Saint Paul wrote:

“For our Gospel did not come to you in word alone, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with much conviction.”

Together, our different gifts accomplish God's will on earth and builds up the Body of Christ, and this does not happen under our own steam. The Holy Spirit guides the Church.

Of course, the Pharisees did not see things this way. They were out to get Jesus by posing a trick question to him:

“Is it lawful to the pay the census tax to Caesar or not?”

Notice that Jesus did not go into a lengthy explanation, or get into an argument with the Pharisees; but he obviously thought about what he was going to say before he said it. What a brilliant answer! On one side of the question was the Herodians who served King Herod and, of course, they thought the temple tax should be paid. On the other side of the coin were the Jews who resented paying the temple tax. Jesus was caught in the middle. But his one line answer confounded both sides:

“Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.”

This too, is a lesson for us. Stop and think about what you are going to say, before you say it. We often spout off the first thing that comes to mind. Maybe we should not be too hard on ourselves though, because Jesus did call the Pharisees hypocrites. He was short-tempered with them on occasion, too.

Speaking about what belongs to God ... the First Reading makes it pretty clear that we belong to God. It said:

“I have called you by your name ... I am the Lord and there is no other, there is no God besides me. It is I who arm you, though you know me not, so that toward the rising and the setting of the sun, people may know that there is none besides me. I am the Lord, there is no other.”

We belong to God. We are His forever. Our life is passing quickly, and the things the secular world values may not be of lasting value in the long run. We work, pay taxes and become responsible citizens; and these things are necessary for the good of the society that we live in. However, we should never forget who we belong to. God’s face is not on the front of a coin. The Eucharist we receive at Mass is the body of Christ. He is not a coin, but a person. The secular world has coins. We have Jesus. Eternal life with the Lord Jesus is worth more than all the coins that we have ever had or ever will have. Money cannot buy eternal life. The body and blood of Jesus Christ paid the price so that we could live forever in eternal joy. It is a debt we can never repay. However, we can love him, honor him and glorify him by our lives. He is the Lord, and there is no other.

Peace,
Deacon Don