

HOMILY 29TH SUN OT YRA 2020

There are two things that we all have to do in life. What are they? Die and pay taxes. Al Capone, an infamous gangster from the last century was allegedly involved in all kinds of crimes was in prison for what? Tax evasion. He may have gotten away with murder, but he did not get away with tax evasion. We do not want to mess with the IRS because we are likely to lose. We may not always like paying taxes, but in the end, most of us just take a deep breath and pay.

Taxes were a hot issue 2,000 years ago in Israel. The majority of the taxes went not to Israel but directly to Rome, which was occupying Israel at the time. The Pharisees and the Herodians, who were bitter enemies, teamed up to try and discredit Jesus. They asked him a lose/lose question, “Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?” If Jesus answered yes, he would be seen as a trader to the Jewish people who claimed allegiance to God alone. If he answered no, he would enrage the Herodians, the supporters of Herod of Rome, and he would be in big trouble. Jesus in his wisdom gave them a lose/lose answer. “Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.” So they still had to pay their taxes, and repay the rest to God because in reality, everything comes from God and everything should be repaid to God. Or maybe this is a win/win answer depending upon how you look at it.

How did Jesus identify what belongs to Caesar? He asked them whose image and inscription is on the coin? They responded, Caesar. The IRS makes it very clear what we owe to Caesar every year. And we need to do that. We need many of the services and safety nets that only the government can supply. But what do we owe to God. We are all created in the image and likeness of God. God’s image is on each one of us. We belong to God.

A number of years ago the editorial staff of a Sunday magazine created a “Faith in Life” award and invited readers to nominate someone by telling their stories. They received a large number of nominees who attended church services for years, had given large amounts of money to their church or favorite charity and included newspaper clippings that showed their dedication. Some were surprised when the winner was announced. His nomination arrived as the paper written in crayon with no newspaper clippings attached. The letter read: “Anthony is a plumber. He helped some people fix up a house for my friend’s family because their

first house burned down. He also visited my grandmother in the nursing home and makes her happy with his stories and his harmonica playing. He is a lot like Jesus. I hope he wins. But if he doesn't it won't matter. He will still be the same good old Anthony. Love, Anne.” To repay God you do not have to give away large sums of money and be recognized for it and church attendance, while very good, cannot be an end in itself. There are many ways to repay God. I read this week “The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away.” I think that is what Anthony did to repay God. He found his gifts and he gave them away. We are all going to be able to do this in different ways.

And I think we may be giving too much to Caesar these days. Everything seems to have become politicized. I think we need to take a look at that. Maybe that is giving too much to Caesar. Maybe we need to give that to God. I think we need to look at the news and in some cases social media for what they are and limit our time with them. They are essentially a list of the bad news of the day. That is just what it is. The good news in my life is not going to be on the news. Our Parish is reopening slowly and our Parish Family is being respectful of one another and doing what we need to keep one another safe. That will not be on the news. Our St. Edith School is going into the 8th week in class without any significant problem. That is not going to be on the news. I have close friends and family that I love who love me and they are all healthy. That will not be on the news. Most of us have a great home to be alone in. That will not be on the news. Bring God into the picture and look at all of the news, particularly the good.

So many of the conversations we are having with one another are politicized and emotionally charged. I think we need to stop immediately reacting on an emotional level, bring God into the conversation, and listen more to one another. Listen not with the aim to change the other person. Listen to find a common ground, something you can both agree upon. Then you can have a conversation. You may not agree on everything, but this is a good start.

So pay your taxes, but do not give too much to Caesar. We also need to repay to God what belongs to God. Remember the meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away. That is how we can return to God what belongs to God.