

## TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—2020

The new pastor was a dynamic preacher and, during his first homily, he was really getting the congregation moving. Toward the end he said, “In order for our parish to move forward, this church has to learn how to walk.” To which someone in the back yelled, “Let her walk, Father.” The pastor, inspired then said, “And once this church learns how to walk, it has to learn how to run.” To which some yelled out, “Let her run, Father, let her run.” Really fired up, the preacher went on, “And once running, the church has to learn how to fly.” The enthusiastic response was, “Yes. Yes. Let her fly, let her fly.” Finally Father said loudly, “And in order for her to fly, the church is going to need you to contribute more money.” To that was the cold and solemn response, “Ah, Father, for now, just let her walk; just let her walk.”

At the heart of Pharisees’ and the Herodians’ question to Jesus was nothing but malice and a desire to put Jesus in a bad light. Prior to the arrival of Jesus, the Pharisees and Herodians were bitter enemies. Now we see Jesus beginning to have a real impact, and upsetting the apple cart for both of these groups. We see them now working together against Jesus.

Had Jesus answered that it is lawful to pay the tax to Caesar, he would have alienated many in the crowd who felt that to pay taxes to Rome was treason and a sacrilege, especially since Caesar considered himself divine. For many, even to handle the coin with Caesar’s image on it, was offensive. Had Jesus answered no to the question of taxes, he would have been considered guilty of treason against Rome and could have ended up in jail.

Jesus response to question shifts the argument to another level or plain. He challenges and invites all to consider their priorities and their loyalties. As people and citizens who live in this world, we have to deal with things of this world, including obeying laws, paying taxes, voting, and taking part in the political process, not just for practical reasons, but also so that our ideas and ideals will penetrate the heart of society and become the ideals of our society.

For those who are living in the kingdom of God, it is clear to where the priorities and loyalties lie. The things of this world are passing and cannot compare to what we find in God’s kingdom which continues on and will last for all eternity. Once again, in his wisdom, Jesus sends the dilemma back to the questioners; it now demands a response and a commitment from them. They have to determine to whom they will be loyal; they have to decide to whom they will belong—to Caesar or to God.

While Jesus gives legitimacy to government, it must submit itself to God’s sovereignty, remembering that God’s sovereignty is kind, loving and compassionate, seeking the fulness of life for all. Allegiance to God, which is really responding in love, needs to be absolute, especially in those matters of government and society that deal with the protection of life and the rights and dignity of each any every individual, born or unborn. The same can be said with regard to matters of family, marriage

and our religious freedom. In this, we all need to move beyond the confines of our homes and our Faith Community. The reality and reach of our community needs to extend beyond the registered parishioners or those who attend here on a regular basis.

In the spirit and example of Jesus, we need to show a special concern for people who are poor and vulnerable. Our faith in God and our love for him can be gauged or measured by our attitude toward and care for the weaker members of our society. As we are told over and over again in the Gospels, true discipleship is equated with caring for those in need. This means that as people who profess their faith in Jesus, as individuals and community, we need to address the needs of all people, remembering that to love and serve the least of our sisters or brothers, is to love and serve the Lord.

As election time approaches, even though there are no perfect candidates, we need to exercise our right to vote and, along with our vote, to try and influence those for whom we have voted. Of course, we need to be aware of those candidates who promise us everything without demanding our willingness to do our part and to make the necessary sacrifices to share what we have and make our world a better place. It is only through our participation with those in leadership, whether it be in the area of our government or our church, along with our sacrifices and our willingness to share what we have, that real and positive change will come about.

As we continue to answer the Lord's call to follow him, let each of us listen to the response that Jesus made to his questioners and see how we might better give to God what is God's and, as part of a flesh and blood society, to try, especially in this difficult and challenging times, to do what we can and need to do, to help things along. We need to remember that God will not do for us what we can and need to do ourselves. Whatever we do or don't do has a consequence. Reading between the lines today, Jesus reminds us today to rely on God and, at the same time, to be persons of honor, generosity, truth, kindness and compassion. Finally, as we hear in today's first reading, God will arm us, he will give us what we need to do what we need to do.