

Homily for October 19, 2014

• Isaiah 45:1, 4-6 • 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5b • Matthew 22:15-21 [145A]

The readings for the Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time speak to the sovereignty of God. From politics to religion, Scripture teaches us that God alone controls events and has the final word.

The first reading from the book of Isaiah comes from the period of the Babylonian Exile (597–538 BC) and was likely spoken near the end of Israel’s long captivity in Babylon. In today’s reading, Second Isaiah refers to Cyrus as the Lord’s “anointed.” This is a remarkable claim given the fact that Cyrus was king of Persia at the time of this prophecy. Within the Old Testament, the designation of the Lord’s “anointed” was applied only to a select group of kings of Israel, with David being widely regarded as the prime example.

King Cyrus ruled over Persia for nearly thirty years (559–529 BC). He grew Persia into a powerful political and military force, eventually overthrowing the Babylonian Empire in 538 BC. It was in that year that Cyrus released Israel from captivity in Babylon, allowing the exiles to return to their historic Promised Land and begin rebuilding the capital city of Jerusalem and the Temple.

Second Isaiah’s words make it clear that it was God who made possible King Cyrus’ success: “For the sake of Jacob, my servant, of Israel, my chosen one, I have called you by your name, giving you a title, though you knew me not.” In doing so, God gave Persia a clear message: “I am the LORD, and there is no other, there is no God besides me.” The Persian people were polytheists; they believed in and worshipped many gods. For Cyrus, the idea of a single God likely seemed odd, and perhaps even dangerous both religiously and politically.

In the Gospel reading, the Pharisees send their disciples along with the Herodians (supporters of Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea) to trap Jesus publicly on whether or not to pay taxes to the emperor. These men believed they found the perfect question to entangle Jesus: “Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?”

(The men themselves were divided on the issue, since the Pharisees would have been anti-tax and the Herodians—as collaborators with Rome—would have supported the tax. For many Jews living in Palestine, Rome’s census tax was another painful reminder that their

Homily for October 19, 2014

historic Promised Land was under foreign occupation.) But Jesus avoids the immediate trap set for him by offering an alternative view on the topic of taxation. Seen from the perspective of the kingdom of heaven, taxes, and even Caesar himself, are relegated to a subordinate role in the ordering of one's affairs. *Daniel J. Scholz*

So what are we to think when we hear in today's Gospel:

"Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar
and to God what belongs to God."

Government needs to be repaid for the many services that it provides to the people. We all accept that. Sometimes we would prefer that the money comes from someone else's pocket, but we all agree that if the taxes weren't paid economic chaos would soon follow and everyone would suffer.

Repayment to God is a little less structured, but the Psalmist today gives us a few hints:

“Worship the LORD, in holy attire;
tremble before him, all the earth;
say among the nations: The LORD is king,
he governs the peoples with equity.

R/ Give the Lord glory and honor.”

So how do we “Give glory and honor to our God who is the Sovereign King over all of creation?” We heard from Father Ron last week how he gives glory and honor to God, although he did not use those words. He chose to leave his life of comfort and live among the poor in Grenada. His story about the boy who took the small can of rice and beans home to feed his family of five brought tears to my eyes, as I am sure it did to many of you. But we can't all be missionaries to an underdeveloped country, so we participate in the Kingdom of God by giving from our abundance to organizations with a proven track record like Cross Catholic Outreach. As Father Ron said to me after Mass, “Some go as a missionary, and some go by giving”. For most of us “going by giving” is one way we glorify and honor God. We also give glory and honor to God by being responsible citizens, by giving a day's work for a day's pay, by raising a family with good Christian values, by praying for someone in need. As we say at the dismissal, “Go in peace glorifying the Lord

Homily for October 19, 2014

by your life”. There are as many ways to give glory and honor to God as there are ways to love.

Like Cyrus, we too are God’s chosen ones. Chosen and anointed at our baptism to become priest, prophet, and king in the Kingdom of God. We are chosen to become Christ to one another so that the entire world will know that God is Lord, and there is no other.

God not only anointed us for work in the kingdom, he also placed within our heart a desire to do it. We all want our life to be relevant, to have meaning. We all want to make a difference in the lives of others. God gave us that desire, and when we live a life of integrity, integrating God into our daily living circumstance, it becomes our very definition of having a good day.

Today’s culture would like to separate us from God. It is fine if you worship God on Sunday, but come Monday morning, you better not mention his name in the marketplace or you might upset someone. But how does that square with returning to God what belongs to God? How does that square with living a life of integrity? Is not the workplace our mission field?

Mary and I were at Homemaker’s Furniture a couple of weeks ago when we struck up a conversation with the salesman as we tried out one of their “Ekorness” chairs. He asked me what I did for a living, and I told him that I was a recently retired homebuilder, but I kept busy being a deacon in the Catholic Church. He offered that he used to be a Catholic, but he now attends another church. Then he mentioned that he was an “Alpha” leader and he was so excited because they started the first ever “Workplace Alpha” in this region.

Now, I know that everyone here at Saint Cecilia knows all about Alpha since we are in our third running of the program here, but for the sake of the visitors among us: Alpha gives everyone the opportunity to explore the meaning of life in a relaxed, friendly setting. Sessions last about ten weeks, and they begin with a meal followed by a short talk and time to discuss what has been taught. In addition to Alpha in the workplace, they have adapted their program to suit the needs of many other contexts such as: youth, campus, military, prisons, seniors, braille and one just for us Catholics.

Homily for October 19, 2014

But, let's go back to the story. The salesman said that 35 Homemaker's employees now meet once a week to participate in an Alpha program. Can you imagine how powerful it could be for an organization to have that many employees going through Alpha all at the same time? It could transform the culture of the entire workplace. Look at the possibilities. A toxic work environment could now become a place of life giving water. Imagine having a good day every day at work!

My point is that if God is Lord of all, He is Lord of the workplace as well. So when you show up for work this Monday morning, throw open the doors to your office and let Christ into your workplace. Keep him on your mind and on your heart as you go about your day. Listen to Him so that the entire world will know that "He is the LORD, and there is no other." Let the letters i.n.c. behind your company name come to mean including Christ. Then you will really have a good day.

Deacon Alan Christy

October 19, 2014