

Homily for the 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time, A, 10/18/2020

This has been a difficult year for us because of the coronavirus. Let us remember as we pray today that God is always with us.

In the reading from Isaiah we are reminded that the Lord rules over all nations and that there is only one Lord and one God. May God comfort us in our struggles during these days of confinement.

In our second reading today is taken from the First Letter of Saint Paul to the Thessalonians which is the earliest writing in the New Testament (50-51 AD). Here he reminds us that through our Baptism we are united both to the Christian community and to Christ, Himself is with us.

Today I wish to focus on the Gospel reading from St. Matthew. Jesus is now in the temple area of Jerusalem; this is the teaching area for the people. Here we see a debate taking place between Jesus and some men, the Pharisees and Herodians. They were there to trap Jesus in his speech. A crowd gathers around them eager to follow this lively debate. The Pharisees and Herodians begin an argument with Jesus. This is an odd set of debaters for the Pharisees are separatists, who despise being under the power of Rome and the Herodians are supporters of Roman occupation. Here is their trap. They ask: *“Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”* If Jesus says “yes” he would be looked up on as a traitor by the pious people of Israel. If He says “no” he could be arrested by the Herodians for the crime of sedition. Jesus is wise and knows how to avoid this trap. He asks his own question in return for theirs. He asks for a coin and says: *“whose image is on it?”* They reply: *“Caesar’s.”* Jesus then points out that to accept and carry a Roman coin was to admit that they had an obligation for their existence to the power of Rome. I love Jesus’s famous words: *“Render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.”* Jesus doesn’t spell out what belongs to Caesar

and what belongs to God. It has to be a personal decision. We need to go to next week's Gospel reading for Jesus's follow up teaching of the Two Great Commandment: "**Love God and Love Neighbor.**"

How does this Gospel today apply to us? We know that as American citizens we have a double citizenship. We are **Americans** and love our nation and we are **Catholics** who love our freedom to worship as Catholics. Thomas Jefferson, one of our founding fathers who was a deist. Deists are those who *reject revelation as a source of religious knowledge and assert that reason and observation of the natural world are sufficient to acknowledge the existence of a supreme being or creator of the universe*. Jefferson, himself has a prayer for our nation.

"Almighty God, you have given us this land for our heritage. Bless our heritage and bless this land ... save us from violence and from every evil way. Defend our liberties. Endow us with the spirit of wisdom so that we can show forth Thy praise among all nation and in time of prosperity fill our hearts with thankfulness and in the days of trouble, suffer not our trust in Thee to fail; all of which we ask through Jesus Christ. Amen."