

29A 2020 SML
MT 22:15-21

People mostly talk about health when they are unhealthy. People mostly talk about fear when they are afraid. People mostly talk about the economy when the economy is tanking. People mostly talk about freedom when they are in danger of losing it or when they are being persecuted.

Since Our Blessed Lord came into a country that was persecuted, it was to be expected that most would have a desire for no other kind of freedom than the political, or release from those who were their persecutors. When the word “freedom” was used in the time and place of Our Blessed Lord, it was almost always understood in the political sense of overthrowing the persecution of Caesar, the persecution of Rome.

And Our Lord constantly had to deal with this problem, either because the people hoped He would be a political liberator, or because when He spoke of freedom, it was misunderstood as liberation from Rome. So their trying to trap Jesus was nothing new.

Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming.
(MT 9:3) Who can forgive sins but God alone? (MK 2:7)

Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners? (MT 9:11; MK 2:16)

Why do we and the Pharisees fast but your disciples do not fast? (MT 9:14)

They watched Him closely to see if He would cure Him on the sabbath so they might accuse Him. (MK 3:2)

When Jesus left, the scribes and Pharisees began to act with hostility toward Him and to interrogate Him about many things, for they were plotting to catch Him at something he might say. (LK 11:53)

Doesn't your Teacher pay the temple tax? (MT 17:25)

From day one, when he cured a man on the Sabbath, the gospel tells us:

The Pharisees went out, and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against Him, to destroy Him. (MK 3:6)

As an aside, the whole time I was preparing and writing this homily, I felt like I am listening to Supreme Court Justice confirmation hearings . . . 😞

What is so amazing is the Pharisees, those who hated the Roman government, and the Herodians, those who were the Roman government, hated each other. They could not stand each other, but they hated Jesus even more.

Today's Gospel is an example "par excellence:"

The Pharisees went off and began to plot how they might trap Jesus in speech. They sent their disciples to Him, accompanied by Herodian sympathizers. "Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?"

This was nothing more than playing the politics of the day. The Herodians could not have come before Our Blessed Lord without arousing some suspicion of their raw motives. Nor did the Pharisees, always conniving, come to Him in person. So note, they sent some of their disciples, their "young scholars," their "students," as though in their guile simplicity, they were merely seeking information. These young students were to give the impression that a dispute had arisen between them and the Herodians, and it would have been very natural, since they hated each other, to settle it by referring their dispute to the Great Scholar.

They began by patronizing Him, thinking that a little flattery would grease the skids with Our Blessed Lord. Their sentimentality dripped off them and it was sickening sweet:

"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. So answer us this: Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?"

And although they didn't believe a word they just said, they were right on the money.

- ✓ Jesus WAS a truthful man
- ✓ He DID teach the way of God according to the truth
- ✓ And He DID NOT care with whom He was speaking.

But Jesus knew their malice.

Time and again, the politics of the day, the hostile opposition was on Jesus' back and they did not get off. Yet Jesus did not allow:

- ✓ the hostile opposition,
- ✓ the thorn in His side,
- ✓ the burden of always having to be careful how he said everything,

to deter Him from being what God the Father sent Him to do – and that is to be a Savior. To Our Blessed Savior, spiritual freedom was more important than political freedom.

The question this morning is, "What are you sent here to do?" Micah, the Old Testament "prophet of the persecuted," sums it up in one of the most beautiful verses of Sacred Scripture:

You have been told, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: only to do right and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)

So now that you know what you are supposed to do, when are you going to do it? All four gospel writers use certain vocabulary to tell you when to start. *Kai ethus*: immediately! Fifty-nine times in the Gospel is the word “immediately” used. Start *kai ethus*, start immediately. Another term used by all four gospel writers is “today.” Fifteen times in the Gospel is the word “today” used. Start today.

From the letter I inserted in my Christmas cards, back in 2001, the Christmas before I returned to the active priesthood:

To make a long story short, I’ve had a hell of a summer discerning my way back to the priesthood. I’ve met with Bishop Smith on several occasions to discuss my concerns about returning to the ministry and I like what he had to say. By September I knew what I had to do. I put my house on the market. It sold in three days. Every step of the way from Virginia to New Jersey just fell right into place.

After 9/11, no one knew how the economy would be affected. No one knew how the real estate market would be affected.

- ✓ Him, haw.
- ✓ Sell now?
- ✓ Wait ‘til spring?
- ✓ Wait ‘til conditions are better?

- ✓ Wait 'til the time is perfect?

If I waited until conditions were perfect to return to the priesthood, I'd still be in Virginia.

Excuses there were listed in the scriptures:

- ✓ Let me bury my father first
- ✓ Let me say good bye to my family first
- ✓ I just bought a field
- ✓ I just bought five oxen
- ✓ I just got married.

If God waited until the time was perfect to send his Son, we would still be waiting. There will always be hostile opposition. The Jews needed to be free of persecution to follow Jesus and so they refused Him. But Jewish history shows in the Book of Exodus, that the Jews were enslaved for 430 years to Egypt. Seven times, according to the Book of Judges, they were enslaved to the Canaanites. In addition, they were enslaved for 70 years in Babylon, in bondage to the Philistines, to the Assyrians, to the Chaldeans; and now to Rome.

So what are we waiting for?

- ✓ The pandemic to be over
- ✓ The economy to improve

- ✓ The election
- ✓ Life to return to normal
- ✓ What?

The time will never be perfect to do God's will. There will always be something on your plate. But according to the gospel message, once you know what you're supposed to do, do it. Start kai ethus. Start today.