

29th Sunday- A (Deacon Pat Hall)

Homilies are aids to encountering the living Word.

First, please read the scripture passages that inform this homily:

Isaiah 45:1, 4-6; Psalm 96:1, 3, 4-5, 7-8, 9-10; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5b; Matthew 22:15-21

These readings can be found at: <http://www.usccb.org/nab/101908.shtml>.

You heard in our readings all about the Persian King Cyrus.

God anointed that pagan king even though Cyrus did not know the God of Israel. Cyrus was embroiled in the wars of empire.

He may have known little about a displaced group of Israelites held captive in the enemy empire of Babylon.

Yet he was understood by the Jews as being God's instrument in restoring his chosen people to their homeland.

Anointing according to the Bible had been reserved for Hebrew prophets and kings.

The word "anointed one" means "Messiah" for the Jews and translates to "Christ" for us Christians.

After the 11:30 mass this weekend, we will have an infant baptism.

That baby boy will be anointed with the Chrism oil to be priest, prophet and king, a little "Christ".

A pagan king bent on empire, Hebrew prophets, a baby in Bethlehem and a baby at St. Tom's: all anointed ones...and of course so are you, the one chosen by God to carry out the divine will to save.

God made humans in his divine image.

He revealed himself to shepherd his people.

He became one with his people and shared the Spirit so that his people could be one in him.

Jesus gave us his sacraments so that we could participate in his very life, so that we too could be little "Christs".

Being a Christ is about being in relationship with Jesus and it is about being Christ to others bringing them into relationship with Jesus.

We are creatures of this earth and we are creatures of the divine.

Our modesty causes us to shy away from considering ourselves divine.

We have seen the arrogance and tragedy when humans have positioned themselves, of claiming personal divinity and absolute power over others.

The divinity we claim is not because of our own power and deservedness.

The divinity we claim is because we are in family relationship with our God, our father.

We are sisters and brothers to God incarnate.

We were made to be with God for all eternity.

This does not make us powerful or mighty, but it does make us responsible.
If we are children of the divine, doesn't anyone think we should act like it?

Think about the virtues that define being humane: compassionate, kind, tolerant, forgiving, merciful, tender, clement and benevolent.
Don't those virtues apply to the divine?
If you could describe any particular activity as humane, could you not possibly substitute the word divine without altering the sentiment?

This divinity that God offers you has nothing to do with your abilities.
God offers this to those who are fleet of foot, strong of arm and brilliant of mind and to those who are blind, deaf, mute and rejected by others.

Yes, you are the anointed ones...Christs.
Just remember it is God who does the anointing and we who do the responding.
But how do we respond humanely...divinely?

Well we have a clue thanks to a God who loved us so much that he embraced weakness to be born in a Bethlehem stable and suffered all the cruel injustices evil could inflict.

As an itinerant preacher, Jesus healed the sick, raised the dead and advocated for the poor.

He challenged the established order.

He offered divine justice.

The authorities of the day could not tolerate such.

Stability was based on a complex and tenuous fabric of alliances and arrangements between the military power of Rome, the caretaking authority of the Herodians and the social and religious coalition of Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees.

A lot was at stake.

This is the setting of today's Gospel story, when the Pharisees flattered Jesus only to set him up with an unanswerable question.

When they asked about the propriety of a Jew having to pay the head tax to a pagan ruler, they thought they had Jesus check-mated.

If he said "yes", then Jesus would have angered the local Jewish folks who resented and detested their Roman occupiers.

If he said "no" then he would have left himself open to sedition charges, a charge that did ultimately lead to Calvary.

Jesus' response not only out-smarted the conniving Pharisees, but he gave an example of how to be human in this world without compromising our divine relationship: "Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."

This was the example that our patron saint, Thomas More, emulated.

More was a person of his times.

He rose in power to become the chancellor to King Henry VIII of England.

This was at the time of the protestant reformation.
Many people were repulsed by scandals in the Church.
Martin Luther's theology was being embraced by those seeking their conscience and others seeking freedom from the Church's temporal authority and taxes.
King Henry VIII personally chafed under the Church's interference in his remarriage plans.

As a devout Catholic, Thomas More stayed faithful to his Church.
Thomas More could not entertain the idea that God could be expressing himself to the world in any way outside the Church.

As an Englishman, More was loyal to king and country.
In that day people did not see any separation of Church and State.
The Church had temporal power in the civil affairs of the day and kings ruled by divine right.
People throughout history understood government as having been instituted by God as the means by which the common good was served.

As the fissure grew and King Henry declared himself head of the Church of England, Thomas More tried to give unto Caesar and give unto God.
That struggle was made familiar to us in the play and film productions of *A Man for All Seasons*.
In the end he was unjustly maneuvered and framed by those doing the king's will.
At his execution, judged guilty of sedition, St. Thomas More declared, "I am the King's good servant, but God's first."

Jesus' example of giving unto Caesar and giving unto God had a similar conclusion.
Jesus was later executed for sedition.
The placard over his head was inscribed, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."

The image of the cross, the inscription on the placard—is this an echo of Jesus' asking about whose image and inscription was on the Roman coin?

Our savior... and our saint role-modeled for us Christians how to be divine children of God in a political and economic world.
We here enjoy the blessings of a democracy and free enterprise system.
Yet many of us here have been hammered by those who have wielded their power with selfishness and greed.

We anointed ones are called to be prophets, to be God's voice to advocate for the poor and powerless; to be priests, to bring healing to those who hurt; and to be kings, to protect and serve those whom God has given to us.

In feudal times, the princes and lords by divine right were responsible for the common good.

The serf was resigned to bear life and survive.
If the common good was not advanced, it was not the serf's fault; it was the prince's fault.

The prince would have to answer to God for the failure.

(Read sarcastically) I like democracy because then **I** have a vote in what **I** want.
Our national and local candidates cater to that desire.
We hear all kinds of promises of who will get what and who else will have to pay for it.
I like it when **I** get more at someone else's expense.

But, if democracy is seen as a divine institution, then the responsibility for the common good resides in the citizen, in me and in you.

If you and I don't participate for the common good, we will have to answer to God for the failure.

This political season gives us that opportunity.

You will have the chance to vote for candidates whom you judge to have the character and vision to provide for that common good.

The Church avoids partisanship and does not tell you for whom to vote.

The Church does advise you to use Jesus' humane and divine example as a measuring stick for your elected servants.

You will also have the opportunity to vote on state proposals.

This is law-making at the grass roots level.

Here the Church does presume to advise you.

Proposal 2 on the Michigan ballot advocates for embryonic stem cell research.

That would allow the destruction of human life at the earliest stages and unregulated scientific experimentation on human embryos.

The Church encourages a "No" vote on Proposal 2.

This is predicated on what the Church defines as human.

I venture to say how you define "human" would determine how you would vote on Proposal 2.

How one defines "human" would determine the positions one might hold regarding abortion, capital punishment, euthanasia, exploitation of the poor and waging war.

My personal experience of witnessing heated discussions on these issues is that people are arguing from different perspectives on what is human or whose life is more important.

I shared a few weeks ago at the other masses that our world cultures have had different understandings of what is human.

In ancient times, tribal warfare was often genocidal as our tribe was human, the other not.

In medieval Japan, male offspring were so preferred that female infanticide was condoned.

In our own country, Americans bought and sold other Americans.

What owner could consider his property human?

The Church teaches that humanity begins at conception.
At conception, that human creation, that divine child of God, is sacred.

Some months ago, every registered Catholic family in Michigan was mailed a DVD about the issues surrounding embryonic stem cell research.
In touting the cures obtained from **adult** stem cell research, these proponents tried to ease the tension that some might have if they thought they had to choose between the preservation of human embryos and curing those with debilitating disease.

Adult stem cell research and other scientific techniques have shown great promise with real cure results.

Embryonic stem cell research has yet to yield cures despite their advocates' claims of potential.

In the end, though, whether or not one scientific technique yielded better results than another, if you truly believe that human embryos are humans, what humans would you sacrifice for the betterment of other humans?

I say we see enough of that around the world already.

You are God's anointed one.

Live in this world God gave you with faith, love and hope.

Treat each other as if both of you were divine.

Give unto Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's.

Just remember, it is all God's.