



Homily for 10/18/2020

Very Rev. J. David Carter, JCL, JV

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time A / 20th Sunday after Pentecost

Have you ever been in a situation where someone is playing the game of “gotcha” with you? A loaded question is asked, and if you answer it one way, you are condemned for not having answered the opposite. And if you answer it the opposite way, you are similarly condemned for not having answered the other way. Either way, your opponent declares, “gotcha”. It is basically a political move that we see played out every day in this intense and charged political environment of ours. Damned if you do and damned if you don’t. If you say something that is true, it is spun to resemble something false, usually by appeals to emotional arguments and sound-bite-length charges of offense. But this is nothing new. Even Jesus was confronted with the same game as recorded in today’s Gospel. The setup happens when the Pharisees try to entrap Jesus, and the issue of the Roman occupation comes into play. They hate Jesus and want him dead and are even willing to bring in another enemy of theirs to bring it about. They ask, “Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?” Caesar, of course, being the Ruler of the Roman Empire that was in control of the people of Israel through a puppet king and a Governor over Judea. Paying the tax was a capitulation to being a subjected and oppressed people. If Jesus were to say that one should pay the tax, the Pharisees hoped that the people would turn against him, reject him and maybe even stone him to death for being a collaborator with the evil forces oppressing the Jewish people. On the other hand, if Jesus were to say one should not pay the tax, they could hand him over to the authorities with the charge of sedition and inciting rebellion. But Jesus, as always, answers in a very clever way that cuts through political rhetoric and gets to the very heart and truth of the human condition. And with his answer, if you will pardon the pun, he coins one of the most memorable phrases in Christian parlance, “Render unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God.”

A brilliant and incisive statement that resonates throughout the ages and speaks to the truth that God’s power and position is essentially different from the power of the temporal state. There is a justice in paying one’s taxes, but it is subordinated to the higher reality of God, the Creator of all and the One to whom we must ultimately render an account of our stewardship of the goods of this world. This should inform all of our decisions as Christian people when we interact with the world. If you want to know more about this, tune in this Wednesday for our Webinar on Catholics and Elections at 6pm. It will be hosted via Zoom with the link on our website. We will also broadcast it on Facebook as well.

Now, on a more practical level, we also recognize that the work of continuing the proclamation of the Truth of the Gospel - and rendering to God what is His due - needs the resources of this world.

The Mission of Sts. Peter and Paul is to Proclaim Jesus Christ, the font of all Truth, Beauty, and Goodness, and to continue His mission to form disciples from all peoples according to the tradition and patrimony of the Catholic Church. To put it simply, our mission is precisely to Render to God what is God’s – We owe to God the duty of Worship. We owe to Him also the debt of Thanksgiving for the salvation He won for us. That is what we do in this beautiful space built for His glory. That is why we have these beautiful appointments of furniture, vestments and vessels. This is our primary task, to Love God with our whole, heart, mind and soul. But flowing from that is also the duty to love our neighbor as ourself. We do this primarily through the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Many of those take place on our campus and through our facilities. Naturally, then, one of our Strategic Priorities is the preservation of our facilities. From the pulpit, confessionals, classrooms, meeting spaces and offices of our parish we instruct, advise, console, forgive, and bear one another’s burdens. We bury the dead from the funeral Mass here to our Catholic cemetery in East Ridge. From the Basilica we set out for the visitation of the sick and homebound and sponsor the prison ministry when we are allowed in. Many people come to our doors to be clothed, fed, and supported, which we do through our sister organizations like the St. Vincent De Paul Society and the Ladies of Charity, substantially supported by your contributions.



To render unto God what is His due requires us to utilize the goods of this world as good stewards and generous givers, not just from our surplus, but even from our essentials. Every year during this time we conduct our Annual Stewardship Drive to meet the needs of our parish's mission. Without your support, the family of Sts. Peter and Paul can't accomplish this mission.

Last week we presented the Report at the end of the Fiscal Year. This week we are conducting our Annual Stewardship Appeal. I would like to invite the ushers to now come forward in order to pass out this year's Stewardship Pledge forms. If one member of every household here present can raise your hand so that the ushers can hand you a form. Please take one even if you give online or have turned in a form already. There should be pencils in your pews if you need one.

I am asking everyone who calls the Basilica their home to participate now in this tangible way by submitting a stewardship pledge form. If you have already turned in a form or if you give online, you can indicate that on this form.

For those watching on our livestream who cannot make it to church at this time, please fill out the pledge form on our website and send it to us by email or mail.

You will recall that the report last week showed that we had made great progress in our stewardship efforts. Last year we had discovered that only about 50% of our registered parish households gave in a recordable way. We set a very audacious goal of 100% participation; that is, every family that calls Sts. Peter and Paul home would participate in our stewardship program. I am very happy to report that that number is now at 88%! That's awesome. Because of the generosity of our parishioners, during the Coronavirus lock-down and continuing slow-down, we were able to keep the Church open and were able to offer so many ministerial services to our parishioners through technology via the internet and phone calls and also in our drive-by Eucharistic Adoration.

Despite the positive picture that last year's stewardship appeal gave, we still have ongoing needs. We have increased expenses because of the additional third priest to minister to the growing Hispanic community. We are especially worried about the facilities of the parish, including our roof and HVAC, both of which are substantial capital investments. We also still have 12% to go on 100% participation. Now is **not** the time to sit back and relax. We have to be vigilant over this next year to ensure the good that we have begun does not stall mid-course.

If you notice, we continue to use the 'Stair-steps of giving'. On the lower left side, you notice the place where it indicates the number of registered households who don't give in a recordable way. Last year that number was 276. This year it is only 56! So many of our parishioners have taken the step onto the giving stairs. I invite you at this time to consider where you might be able to find yourself on the stairsteps and if you can, consider taking the next step. On the reverse side is the Online Donation Form which we encourage you to fill out if you can. Online donations are what helped our parish continue the mission during the pandemic lock-down. We very much encourage everyone to give in this way.

We now will have a time for you to fill out this form.

2 minutes

Will the ushers please come forward to collect the completed pledge forms.