

29th Sunday A - WORLD MISSION

Isaiah 45: 1, 4-6; 1 Thessalonians 1: 1-5b; Matthew 22: 15-21

“Count your blessings” or “Look for blessings in your burdens” is one of the phrases we’ve heard or reminded ourselves of, especially when we are going through tough times.

Recently, I’ve found myself caught in many urgent matters. I overslept and missed celebrating the 7 am Mass last Wednesday. Thanks to Fr. Clement who bailed me out of the embarrassing situation. Yes, even a priest, a man of faith, is burdened and fed up with problems. Who isn’t?

I take comfort from a Peanuts comic strip, when Lucy’s feeling sorry for herself and she laments, “My life is a drag. I’m completely fed up. I’ve never felt so low in my life.”

Her little brother Linus tries to console her and he says, “Lucy, when you’re in a mood like this, you should try to think of things you have to be thankful for; in other words, count your blessings.”

In today’s second reading, the letter to the Thessalonians, addressed to the Church as a whole, St. Paul prayed that grace and peace would be with them.

Continuing with his Letter, Paul reminded the Thessalonians of all the blessings they had received.

**“We give thanks to God always for all of you,
remembering you in our prayers, unceasingly calling to mind your
work of faith and labor of love and endurance in hope of our Lord
Jesus Christ.”**

And in today’s Gospel from St. Matthew, our attention is drawn towards the few who did not shine very much, if at all, in the eyes of God. Our attention is drawn to the Pharisees who were siding with the Herodians to trap Jesus with a question. “Tell us, what is your opinion: Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?”

If Jesus had said, “Yes, it should be paid,” the Pharisees were ready to spread the words of his answer among the people who hated the Roman authority.

If Jesus said, “No, don’t give them any of your money,” the Herodians were ready to jump on their horses and off to the Roman governor to have Jesus arrested for causing civil disobedience.

You see, the Herodians supported king Herod and were extremely loyal to the Romans. The Pharisees, on the other hand, rejected their submission to foreign power. They wanted the occupiers out of their lives and land.

Any answer given by Jesus was bound to put him in imminent danger. Perceiving their malice, he asked them for a coin with Caesar’s image and inscription, and then said:

**“Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar
and to God what belongs to God.”**

My guess is that many of us, myself included of course, have probably incorporated each of these situations into our spiritual lives at different times and in various circumstances.

It’s a shame how we tend to minimize what belongs to God. Think about it for a minute. God created everything; God owes us nothing and yet gives us everything, even his Son.

In other words, no matter how much we do or don’t do we can never “pay God back” fully what belongs to God. That’s just not possible, which is why Jesus became one of us and paid the ultimate price, his very self -- to redeem us -- to “buy us back” if you will, and thereby reconcile us with the Father.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ:

Earlier, we spoke of counting our blessings. As disciples of Jesus, we are to see our life and world gifted by God. And most importantly, we are to entrust to God all the things in life, blessings as well as burdens.

There is a story as told by Dalton Roberts about a mentally challenged person in his family. This family member calls him, “Dada.”

He doesn't give this person's name, but he does say that "his love is one of the most potent healers in my life."

Roberts recalls once when he was feeling quite alone and was staring out the window at the rain. Quiet, slow tears were creeping down his face. Suddenly an arm was around his shoulders and a voice was saying, "Don't cry, Dada. I still love you."

On another occasion Roberts had gone through a painful breakup with a lady and he received these healing words, "Don't worry, Dada. I think I'm gonna keep you."

Once, while they were making a trip together by car, Roberts began singing to stay awake. He realized his voice sounded unpleasant. He apologized. "That's all right, Dada," came the reply. "To me, you can do no wrong."

Roberts asks, "If just one person in the world feels you can do no wrong, what more can you expect out of life?"

Maybe mentally challenged people have limitations of the mind, however Roberts concludes, there is no limitation on their hearts. He suggests we call them the "love-gifted."

Dear friends, some of us may be a caretaker for someone with limitations, or someone who is ill or someone who is aging or someone who is hurting. Or there may be some other circumstance in our life that is quite burdensome. Can we find a blessing in that burden?

Like St. Paul, who gave thanks to God in all circumstances of his life, sorrows and joys, and became a holy example to all of us, let us look around and see those with us, at church, at home, at work, at school, as "love-gifted".

May we encourage them with the blessings we've received, and live each day, as if it were our first day, as if it were our last day, as if it were our only day. Amen.