

## Deacon Mark Homily 10/18/20

Read: Isaiah 45:1, 4-6; Psalm 96; 1 Thessalonians 1: 1-5b; Matthew 22: 15-21

In our gospel today the Pharisees in their attempt to entrap Jesus, join with the Herodians. Normally these two groups oppose one another, the Pharisees are against Roman rule and favor a self-ruling Jewish authority, the Herodians, followers of King Herod, favor Roman rule. It is like two forces of selfish ambition joining together to eliminate the one who is a threat to their authority. One way for this union of selfish ambition to defeat Jesus or so they thought, was to set a trap and discredit Him in the eyes of the people. If Jesus replied that it was lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar He would of looked like He favored the Roman government, if He replied that it was unlawful to pay the census tax to Caesar then that would have been a sign of hostility to the Roman government. The Pharisees start their encounter with Jesus by buttering Him up, using a little flattery or insincere praise; they call Him “teacher”, the same title that we hear some of His closest disciples call Him. As a matter of fact, Jesus is called “teacher” 45 times in the gospels. The Pharisees say that they know Jesus is a “truthful” man and that He teaches the way of God. But their minds and hearts are filled with ambition and that is all they can see. The compliments by the Pharisees toward Jesus may fool some but they do not fool Jesus. Jesus is truth and the Pharisees and the Herodians are not seeking truth, they are not concerned about eternal salvation even though the Pharisees did believe in the resurrection, they were more interested in building themselves up in this world rather than the next and Jesus was a threat to their status quo. What about you and I, are we sometimes like the Pharisees? Are there times in our lives when we get so wrapped up in our own worldly desires that we lose sight of the prize, we lose sight of the purpose why God gave us life. Do we take our eyes off of Jesus and spend to much time in front of the mirror? It is easy to do, and it is hard to keep our eyes and concentration on the one who tells us to “be not afraid” and “trust in Him”. No wonder through the centuries when the Church needed a self-correction, she turned to the monastic orders who had their eyes fixed on Christ. As Catholic Christians and citizens of the United States we have an obligation both to God and Caesar; Jesus made that clear with His response. When I was in high school, we learned the phrase “power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely”. It was an observation by a British historian in the late 19<sup>th</sup>

century that a person's sense of morality lessens as his or her power increases. That's why we have checks and balances in our government, but even those checks and balances can't govern the moral decisions without assistance from the soul of the nation, it's people. As Catholics we are called to develop a good conscience and in that good conscience to exercise our rights and duties as citizens. The worst thing we can do, is do nothing when we see injustice, or strife or famine or any other cruelty or oppression. Just as Jesus exposed the Pharisees and Herodians malice or ill will, we too are to expose and act on present day issues that are contrary to Catholic social teaching. As Catholic Christians, we should be the best of citizens in gratitude and collaboration and be on guard when Caesar tries to claim rights that belong only to God. Giving to Caesar what belongs to Caesar in our world today is that which is necessary for the common good of all citizens such as paying our fair share of taxes, being honest citizens, voting in our elections, giving an honest day's work for an honest day's pay. Supporting efforts of peace and unity, of law and safety, of equality, respect, and dignity for all people. Giving to God what belongs to God is our following His will in our life, His commandments which can be broken down to loving God with our whole heart, mind, and soul and loving our neighbor as ourself. And living out the gospel passage of Matthew chapter 25, feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, cloth the naked, care for the ill and visit the imprisoned. We all hold two citizenships, each with its own duties and benefits, one to the country of our birth and the other through our baptism as adopted sons and daughters of God we are given citizenship in His heavenly Kingdom. Our faith in Christ commands us to live out both citizenships here on earth with justice and responsibility. To accomplish that, we must be anchored. Jesus is our anchor; every ship is connected to its anchor by an anchor chain. Our anchor chain, our connection to Christ Jesus is through the Sacraments and Prayer. To be anchored in Jesus also means we need to read scripture but scripture without prayer makes us only a bible historian, not a disciple. Daily prayer keeps us in the loop with the one we belong too, and to who's image and likeness we were made. Last week you received a sheet in your bulletin from the Bishops of our State speaking about Faithful Citizenship. If you have not read it, I would encourage you to do so or type in USCCB on your computer and go to the section on faithful citizenship.

In that letter from the bishops, is a paragraph written by Blessed Frederic Ozanam who was the founder of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and he wrote: "Let us learn, first of all, to defend our belief without hating our adversaries, to appreciate those who do not think as we do, to recognize that there are Christians in every camp, and that God can be served now as always! Let us complain less of our times and more of ourselves. Let us not be discouraged, let us be better." Quoting our bishops, they said, "Blessed Frederic Ozanam showed that our political participation must be influenced by our Catholic faith and not the other way around." Our Catholic faith teaches us about the sanctity of life and last November the Catholic Bishops of the United States stated, and I quote, "the threat of abortion remains our preeminent priority because it directly attacks life itself, because it takes place within the sanctuary of the family and because of the number of lives destroyed. While we noted not to dismiss or ignore other serious threats to human life and dignity such as racism, the environmental crisis, poverty and the death penalty, we renewed our commitment to protect the most fundamental of all human rights ----- the right to live." End quote. We are to be like Jesus, not forcing others to our allegiance which violates their freedom but through prayer and invitation. That I see as our duty to both God and Caesar.