

THE TWENTY –NINTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME.

18 OCTOBER 2020

READINGS: Isaiah 45:1, 4-6 1Thesalonians 1:1-5 Matthew 22:15-21

The tension between Jesus and the religious leaders of the day is growing, so much so that two very different groups who have little in common decide to plot together against Jesus. Beginning by flattering him, they ask Jesus, if it is permissible to pay taxes to Caesar or not. If Jesus were to say yes he would offend the Pharisees and the religious people, who resented paying taxes to a foreign power which would demean the Lordship of God. If he said no then the Herodians, who as friends of the Romans, would have no objection to paying tax to Caesar could have reported Jesus to the Roman authorities as a seditious person and had him arrested. Either way they hoped to trap Jesus into offending one group or the other. Jesus sees through their hypocrisy and asks to see the denarius, the money required to pay the tax. Interestingly Jesus has no coin of his own. The answer to their question lies in their own pockets! In the time of Jesus coins belonged to the ruler and so as the denarius bears the image of Caesar, Jesus tells his questioners to give to Caesar what belongs to him. Jesus then goes on to remind his questioners of their duty to give to God what belongs to him. Taken by surprise at his answer, his accusers slink away defeated in their desire to embarrass him.

We are created in the image and likeness of God and so bear his image. The Lord calls us to render ourselves to him, in other words we are called to live the life of Jesus in the here and now, making sure that he comes first in all that we seek to do in our lives. Naturally we are not just citizens in the kingdom of God, we also live here on earth and have obligations to the communities in which we live and, for the most part, there is little conflict but from time to time we can face challenges where the law of the land or the mores of society conflict with the will of God. More and more we find that the place of God in our society is under attack in our secularist culture where our media in particular can portray a way of life at odds with the way of the Lord. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls us to be salt of the earth and light of the world, revealing the power of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives as we seek to make visibly present in our lives the ways of the Lord by revealing his peace,

justice and love in our relationships with our brothers and sisters. Jesus in his teaching revealed a basic respect for the civil authority but all must be seen in the light of God's reign. The paying of taxes, the obeying of law made for the common good we follow but in a situation of conflict between the two, God comes first and conscience reigns supreme. "For conscience remains the litmus test for all our behaviour. We live in the human city but must always be mindful of our primary citizenship in the city of God."(Fr Roland Faley). Or in the words of St Thomas More, "I am the King's good servant but God's first." Another powerful example of the primacy of conscience is the martyr Blessed Franz Jagerstatter.

Franz was born in Austria in 1907 and after a rather wild life as a teenager he underwent a conversion experience after his marriage in 1936. He and his wife Franziska had three daughters. When Germany occupied Austria Franz was called up to serve in the army but he refused because he held the war to be unjust and he would not fight for the nationalist socialist state, though he was prepared to act as a medical orderly. His family, relatives and priest friends all tried to persuade him to change his mind knowing the consequences of his refusal both for himself and his family He remained constant in his opposition to the authorities and eventually was arrested, tried and sentenced to death. Franz knew the pain he was causing to his family but felt he could do nothing else, His wife hoped for a way out but stood by his decision. Franz was beheaded on 9 August 1943. On 26 October 2007 he was recognised by the Church as a Martyr and Beatified. Whilst in prison he wrote, "I am convinced that it is still best that I speak the truth, even if it costs me my life. For you will not find it written in any of the commandments of God or of the Church that a man is obliged under pain of sin to take an oath committing him to obey whatever might be commanded of him by a secular ruler."

Today is World Mission Day and in his Message to us Pope Francis reminds us that our relationship with God is not something simply private but always in relation to the Church. Having been born to new life in Christ he says "his divine life is not a product for sale....but a treasure to be given, communicated and proclaimed: that is the meaning of mission. We received this gift freely and we share it freely....I am a mission, always, you are a mission, always; every baptised man and woman is a mission....Each of us has a mission in the world,

for each of us is the fruit of God's love" Pope Francis goes on to say: This mission is part of our identity as Christians; it makes us responsible for enabling all men and women to realise their vocation to be adoptive children of the Father, to recognise their person dignity and to appreciate the intrinsic worth of every human life, from conception until natural death. Today's rampant secularism, when it becomes an aggressive cultural rejection of God's active fatherhood in our history is an obstacle to authentic human fraternity, which find expression in reciprocal respect for the life of every person."

In these difficult and uncertain times when so many people are confused and frightened about what lies ahead may we be people who in the words of today's Psalm "tell among the nations his glory and his wonders among all the peoples." May we be fortified by the words of St Teresa of Avila, whose Feast we celebrated on Thursday:

"Let nothing disturb you, nothing affright you. All things pass, God is unchanging. Patience obtains all: whoever has God needs nothing else, God alone suffices."

God bless you,

Fr Hugh