

Reflection for the 29th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Today on the 29th Sunday of Ordinary Time we have two readings that show us two vastly different ways of responding to events that happen in our lives. With daily events or everyday occurrences, we have a choice of ways to respond. Be it when we are driving a car or waiting in line at a store. How do we choose to react to when we are cut off in traffic or spoken rudely to when we are out shopping? I would think that sometimes we rise to the occasion and respond in the Christ-like manner, and other times we are not proud of how we react. Each day, each encounter that we have is a chance for us to not just react in a Christ-like manner but to embrace a way of life that is centered on sharing Christ with the world at large.

In our Gospel reading taken from the Gospel of Matthew, we hear of the Pharisees approaching Jesus and asking Him “is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?” This question asked by the Pharisees on one hand seems like a fair and legitimate question. For as we embrace Christ and know that this embrace changes our relationship with the whole world, as followers of Christ how should we interact with civil authorities? This is a question that is one that does not just have an answer that is provided one time, this question must be answered over and over again. Jesus does provide in our Gospel reading an answer to this question, “repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.” This answer that Jesus provides to the Pharisees provides a framework for how to live in the world but not to be part of the world. The Pharisees that ask the question of Jesus, show that they not only live in the world but are a part of the world. The question asked of Jesus in our Gospel reading this Sunday is not of a noble purpose for it was asked with the intention to entrap Him with His speech.

In our second reading this Sunday taken from the First Letter of St. Paul to the Thessalonians we hear of the noble intentions that St. Paul has as he writes his letter to the Church in Thessalonica. Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy arrived in Thessalonica, a busy port city on the Thermaic Gulf in northern Greece, in the year 50 AD. The first Letter to the Church in Thessalonica that St. Paul wrote to them was written in the year 52 AD. It is possible that this letter that St. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians is the first one that he wrote that is a part of the New Testament. Some scholars think that the letter to the Galatians was written by St. Paul in the year 48 AD.

The first letter that St. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians is personal in nature and it is only in the final two chapters of the letter that the issue of doctrine is addressed. St. Paul’s main purpose of writing the letter is to encourage the members of the Catholic Church in Thessalonica to go on about their daily lives, living in hope of the return of Christ Jesus. The motive of Paul, Silvanus and Timothy is noble in nature in regards to the people of Thessalonica. They are encouraging the Catholic Church to live in community looking forward to the day of the coming of Christ. This is in sharp contrast to the motives of the Pharisees in our Gospel reading today who were trying to entrap Jesus. In closing may we embrace the same motives that Paul, Silvanus and Timothy had when they visited Thessalonica in the year 50 AD, and may we heed the advice that Jesus provides to the Pharisees, “repay to Caesar’s what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.”