

Sunday: 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time.

Year: A

The readings: [Is. 45:1, 4-6; 1 Thess. 1:1-5ab; Mt. 22:15-21]

The message: Giving to God what rightfully belongs to Him.

Prepared by: Catholic Doors Ministry.

Total words: 1683 words.

"Give to God the things that are God's." [Mt. 22:21] What a powerful statement! Good morning everyone! I pray to the Lord Jesus that by the grace of God the Father and the power of the Holy Spirit, the spiritual meaning of today's readings shall enrich all of you as I have been enriched through them.

Beginning with the First Reading from the Book of Isaiah, [Is. 45:1, 4-6] the Lord God addressed His anointed one. As spiritual children of God, having been anointed during the Sacrament of Baptism, we can all welcome this message as if it was intended for each and everyone of us.

During this reading, we heard the Lord God speaking of His almightiness. By His infinite power, nations had been subdued and kings stripped of their robes. Doors had been opened for His anointed one and the gates shall not be closed. This parallels what the Lord God has done for each and every one of us through the anointment of our Baptism. He gave us all a new creation that He guards jealously, [Jas. 4:5] protecting it against the claws of Satan. Through our Baptism, He has opened the doors to Heaven for us to enter, promising never to close them. The promise of the New Covenant is forever. God, unchanging in His nature and promises, shall never take away from us the promise of salvation. If we fall short of persevering in our living faith that leads towards salvation, it will be because of our own free will.

The Lord God proceeded to say that for the sake of those He loved, His servant Jacob and Israel His chosen, He calls us by our names. Though we do not know Him, He surnames us. How true it is that we know very little about God the Father. For His formless nature mystifies our human perception. What we do know of Him, it is through Jesus Christ who "is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." [Col. 1:15] Even though we do not know God as we should know Him, He still calls us by our individual surnames, each and everyone of us being known to Him. It is just awesome to think that God remembers each and everyone of our names, knowing us personally.

Then, the Lord God proceeded to say that He was the Lord. There is no other god beside Him. These words echo the words of the First Commandment. "I am the Lord your God... you shall have no other gods before me." [Ex. 20:2-3] We belong to Him and He wants us!

Next, the Lord God said that although we did not know Him, He arms us. Spiritually speaking, He gives us the spiritual weapons that we need to defeat the enemy. To ensure that we would walk in the light, He gave us our salvation through Christ. He gave us the Holy Catholic Church to continue the apostolic work of Jesus. He gave us the Sacrament of Baptism so we may be born again through faith in Christ, water and the Spirit. He gave us the Sacrament of Reconciliation so we may maintain our righteousness in His sight. He gave us the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist so we may enjoy the Living Bread that leads us to the Kingdom of God. And the list continues... How numerous are His Divine blessings for each and every one of us!

Having reminded us of our blessings, the Lord repeats once more that He is the Lord and that there is no other. No one can do what He has done. No one can even come near doing all what He has done for each and everyone of us. Praise be His Most Holy Name!

Moving on to the Second Reading from the First Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians, [1 Thess. 1:1-5] we learn more about the greatness of God. The reading began by identifying who the writer was. Besides Paul, there was Silas. Silas [Acts 15:22] was one of the leaders of the Jerusalem community who was sent to Antioch after the Council of Jerusalem. [1 Pet. 5:12] Timothy was the son of a Jewish mother and Greek Father. He joined Paul and Silvanus at Lystra [Acts 16:1-3] and helped Paul in his ministry for a great period of time.

The Letter to the Thessalonians was addressed to the Church as a whole. By uniting God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ in the introduction of the Letter, Paul was confirming the Divinity of Christ. Applying his regular greeting and blessing, [2 Thess. 1:2] Paul prayed that grace and peace would be with the Thessalonians.

Saint Paul then proceeded to give thanks to God in prayer for all the blessings that the Thessalonians had received. He mentioned their work of faith, their labour of love and their steadfastness of hope in Jesus Christ. The labour of love is a reflection of active charity. As such, the prayer of thanksgiving to God embraces the virtues of faith, hope and charity that had been bestowed upon the Thessalonians.

Continuing with his Letter, Paul emphasized that it was not just his words that transformed the Thessalonians, but the "power" of the Holy Spirit. Giving credit where it rightfully belongs, Paul made it clear that it was the Holy Spirit who was responsible for all the spiritual manifestations of righteousness.

Paul is a holy example to all of us. He shined as a saintly model who always acknowledged that there is only One God and we should always remember that.

Continuing to the Gospel of Matthew, [Mt. 22:15-21] 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. Their intent was to have Jesus side with either the Pharisees or the Zealots. Consequently, this would cause some friction with one of the parties.

You see, the Herodians supported Herod's succession of rulers. They were extremely loyal to Rome. The Zealots rejected the fact that they were subjected to a foreign power. They wanted the Romans out of their lives. The Pharisees believed as the Zealots but they did not believe in using force to obtain independence. Any answer to the question that was given to Jesus was bound to cause friction with either one of the parties. But Jesus perceived their malice.

Jesus was asked, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor or not?" Jesus asked for a coin and said, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" The New Testament translation of the Latin Vulgate says, "Whose image and inscription is this?" [Mt. 22:20] They answered, "The emperor's." So Jesus told them to give therefore to the emperor the things that belong to the emperor and to God the things that are God's.

To fully understand this tricky question, it is necessary to know and understand what related to the minting of Roman coins. The right to mint a coin proved sovereignty. The Roman Government minted their own coins and jealously guarded this sovereignty, making it an act of rebellion to mint any coins other than under the Roman authority. As such, since the coins were minted by the Roman Empire, they belonged to its Government.

To condemn the paying of taxes would have meant to disagree with the occupancy of the Romans. To agree to pay taxes would have meant to support their occupancy of the land.

Now, one may wonder how this Bible passage relates to the other two readings. It does so through the word "image." Give to God the things that are God's.

Earlier, I spoke of all the blessings that God has given each and every one of us. In Roman 8:29, we learn that "those whom God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the firstborn within a large family." In 1 Cor. 15:49, we learn that "just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of Heaven." 2 Cor. 3:18 tells us, "And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another." And Col. 3:10 tells us, "clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its

creator."

As the Book of Genesis teaches us, man was created in the image of God. Having lost that original image through the disobedience of Adam, God placed in motion a progressive Divine Plan to once more transform us into His glorious image. That is why God gave us so many gifts and blessings. That is why Christ died for us. That is why we are being transformed into the image of Christ through faith, hope and charity.

Belonging to God, we are called to become in His image. We are called to actively maintain our gifts by living our faith in Christ. We are called to give to God what belongs to God so it will not be said, "In their case the god of this world has blinded them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." [2 Cor. 4:4]

Today's message my brothers and sisters is, let us appreciate what God has given us. By the power of the Holy Spirit, let us preserve our gifts and blessings with all our souls, our minds, our spirits, our hearts and our strength. In the Most Holy Name of Jesus, let us keep these gifts stainless so that one day, when we will appear before the Lord God, we will proudly give Him back what He gave us. Then, we will rightfully inherit the assurance of our salvation.

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