

29<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY (A) MATTHEW 22: 15 – 21      OCTOBER 2017

THROUGH HIS PROPHET ISAIAH, GOD SAYS “I AM THE LORD AND THERE IS NO OTHER.” AND YET FOR MANY IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY, THERE SEEM TO BE TWO LORDS, TWO MASTERS: THE GOVERNMENT AND THE ALMIGHTY DOLLAR - BOTH COMMAND ATTENTION. IN MATTHEW’S GOSPEL (REMEMBER IT’S THE GOSPEL WRITTEN BY A TAX COLLECTOR) WE LEARN THAT OUR LORD KNEW THE PROPER BALANCE; HE HAD AN ANSWER FOR US.

THE STORY OF THIS GOSPEL HAPPENS ON THE TUESDAY OF WHAT WE NOW CALL HOLY WEEK - TWO DAYS BEFORE JESUS WAS BETRAYED - AS HE ENTERS JERUSALEM FOR THE THIRD AND LAST TIME. THE PHARISEES AND HERODIANS - TODAY WE WOULD CALL THEM LAWYERS AND POLITICIANS - ASK HIM A TRICK QUESTION. THOSE MEN’S LEADERS, THE PHARISEES, HAD FINALLY REALIZED THAT THE PARABLES WE HAVE HEARD FOR THE LAST 3 WEEKS ABOUT LANDOWNERS, KINGS AND SLAVES, WERE ABOUT THEM. THOSE STORIES WERE REALLY ABOUT THOSE HYPOCRITES WHO PUBLICLY WORSHIP GOD BUT DO NOT FOLLOW GOD’S GREAT COMMANDMENT TO LOVE THEIR NEIGHBORS.

“GIVE TO THE EMPEROR THE THINGS THAT ARE THE EMPEROR’S AND TO GOD THE THINGS THAT ARE GOD’S.” EARLIER IN THE GOSPEL JESUS PUTS TODAY’S LESSON VERY PLAINLY DURING THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT - “YOU CANNOT SERVE BOTH GOD AND WEALTH.”

DO YOU REALIZE THAT TO SOME PEOPLE IN OUR WORLD THAT STORY, THAT LESSON HAS NO MEANING. WE TEND TO ASSUME THAT ANYONE BROUGHT UP IN CANADA WOULD HAVE A BASIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIANITY BECAUSE OUR CULTURE, OUR SOCIETY AND OUR RULE OF LAW IS BASED ON THOSE PRINCIPLES – RIGHT. BUT THIS INCREASINGLY NOT THE CASE. I THINK ALL OF US WOULD BE SURPRISED EVEN ASTONISHED AT HOW FEW TEENAGERS IN ANY CANADIAN HIGH SCHOOL KNOW THE OUR FATHER. THIS IS NOT ONLY

RELIGIOUS DEPRIVATION ON THE PART OF SOME SCHOOL BOARDS; IT IS CULTURAL DEPRIVATION. INCREASINGLY YOU AND I, WE BELIEVERS, ARE GOING TO BE CHALLENGED AND ASKED TO EXPLAIN OUR FAITH, OUR BELIEFS TO THOSE WHO HAVE LITTLE OR NO KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS AND HIS GOSPEL, LET ALONE GOSPEL VALUES.

OUR ARCHBISHOP'S PASTORAL LETTER IS BASED IN PART ON THIS CHALLENGE. TODAY WE ARE FAR MORE LIKELY MEET PEOPLE WHO DON'T KNOW MUCH, IF ANYTHING ABOUT GOD. GOVERNMENTS OF ALL LEVELS HAVE DONE THEIR BEST TO ENSURE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR EVERYONE, IRONICALLY BY REMOVING RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS BELIEFS FROM DAILY LIFE. FROM THE REMOVAL OF PRAYER IN MOST CANADIAN SCHOOLS IN 1988 TO A LAW ALLOWING ASSISTED SUICIDE THIS YEAR, GOVERNMENT HAS REMOVED THE VALUES WE CHERISH AND MADE OUR MISSION EVEN MORE CLEAR.

AS THE PASTORAL LETTER TEACHES US THAT WE NEED, MORE THAN EVER, TO MAKE THE GOSPEL CENTRAL TO OUR LIVES AND THE FOCUS FOR LIFE IN OUR FAMILIES. WE NEED TO LEARN AND EXAMINE OUR FAITH, WE MUST SIT DOWN AND STUDY THE GOSPELS AND, AS FAMILIES, TO SPEND MORE TIME IN PRAYER AND REFLECTION. AND WE NEED TO JOIN IN DISCUSSIONS ON RELIGIOUS MATTERS SO THAT WE ARE PROPERLY EQUIPPED TO PROCLAIM AND TO EXPLAIN OUR FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST.

NOW THAT YOU HAVE A COPY OR CAN READ IT ONLINE, I ENCOURAGE YOU TO READ THE LETTER AND FOLLOW ITS TEACHING. ARCHBISHOP SMITH SUGGESTS THREE SIMPLE WAYS OUR FAMILIES CAN BEGIN TO MAKE THE WORD OF GOD CENTRAL TO THEIR DAILY LIVING: GRACE AT MEALTIME, CREATION OF A PRAYER SPACE IN THE HOME AND FAMILY DISCUSSION OF THE SUNDAY HOMILY ARE IMPORTANT WAYS TO MAKE OUR FAITH MORE CENTRAL TO OUR LIVES.

GRACE IS THE TRADITIONAL PRAYER WE ALL KNOW FOR THE BLESSING OF OUR FAMILY AND THE MEAL BUT WHY NOT ADD AN OPPORTUNITY TO HEAR A LINE FROM

SACRED SCRIPTURE TO THE PRAYER EXPERIENCE, PERHAPS SOME WORDS FROM THE SUNDAY GOSPEL.

TO FOCUS ON THE GOSPEL DAILY, WHY NOT SET UP A SMALL TABLE WITH A CANDLE AND A COPY OF THE BIBLE – A PLACE WHERE MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY CAN SIT TOGETHER OR ALONE TO READ, TO REFLECT AND TO PRAY. I’M SURE SOME OF YOU ALREADY HAVE DONE THIS.

AND FINALLY, HE ASKS US TO MAKE TIME TO DISCUSS THE SUNDAY HOMILY SO THAT WE ARE NOT SIMPLY READING GOD’S WORD BUT RESPONDING TO IT – MAKING IT COME TO LIFE IN OUR HEARTS AND IN THE LIVES OF OUR LOVED ONES. FATHER AND I ARE MAKING OUR HOMILIES AVAILABLE ON THE PARISH WEBSITE SO YOU CAN INVOLVE THE TECHNOLOGY THAT IS SO MUCH A PART OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE’S LIVES AND TEACH THEM HOW TO FIND GOD’S WORD ON THEIR COMPUTERS, TABLETS AND CELL PHONES.

TODAY, WHEN JESUS TELLS US TO GIVE TO CAESAR WHAT BELONGS TO HIM AND GIVE TO GOD WHAT BELONGS TO GOD HE MEANS FOR US TO ASK OURSELVES A SIMPLE QUESTION: JUST WHAT IS IT THAT I OWE TO THE WORLD AND WHAT IS IT THAT I OWE TO THE LORD? WHEN WE PUT THE QUESTION THIS WAY, THE ANSWER BECOMES OBVIOUS. WE OWE CERTAIN THINGS TO THIS WORLD LIKE WORKING OR GOING TO SCHOOL; LIKE VOTING AND PAYING TAXES – THOSE ARE UNAVOIDABLE TRUTHS AND THE GENUINE DUTIES OF CITIZENS.

BUT IF WE ASK WHAT WE OWE TO GOD THERE CAN ONLY BE ONE ANSWER - EVERYTHING. WE CHRISTIANS HAVE THE ADVANTAGE OF BEING ABLE TO PUT THIS WORLD IN PERSPECTIVE. WHAT WE OWE TO CAESAR - TO THE GOVERNMENT, OR TO ANYONE ELSE, CAN NEVER BE EQUATED WITH WHAT WE OWE TO GOD. AS CHRISTIANS WE BELIEVE THAT WE ARE CHILDREN OF GOD FIRST EVEN BEFORE WE ARE CITIZENS OF OUR COUNTRY.

BUT, IN FACT, IT IS TRUER TO SAY WE HAVE DUAL CITIZENSHIP. IT IS OUR

SERIOUS OBLIGATION TO LIVE OUR FAITH AND, IN A DEMOCRACY, IT IS OUR DUTY TO SPEAK UP WHEN WE SEE INJUSTICE TO KEEP THE GOVERNMENT HONEST - TO HELP OUR LEADERS TO REMEMBER THAT THEY ARE NOT PERFECT. WE SHARE A VIEW OF LIFE AND OF MORALITY AS CATHOLIC CHRISTIANS AND WE HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO EXPRESS OURSELVES.