



Blessed Sacrament Parish
Homily by Father Mike Kuse
October 24, 2017 Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading I Isaiah 45:1, 4-6

Psalm 96:1.3.4-5, 7-8, 9-10

Reading II 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5

Gospel Matthew 22:15-21

Homily

“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and give to God what is God’s.” It is nice to throw things around. There are certain passages we all know and we can quote them. But Jesus says, “I don’t want you to quote them, I want you to live them.” So today we are beginning to draw down to the end of the Church year. We started out in Advent preparing for Christ the Son of God. We have gone through the liturgical year bringing us now to these final weeks — and the Scriptures are getting very pointed. They are not playing games with us. Jesus hits right at the people who are trying to trip him up and he says, “Don’t try it. Anyone who follows me has the gift of gratitude. If you don’t have gratitude in your life, don’t claim me as your God. Then find another God somewhere. Because only those who follow me are filled with gratitude.”

That is why Jesus would say to someone, “Come follow me.” He doesn’t say, “Think it over.” He says, “Come follow me.”

I want to share a little story that shows when we give of everything we have, we change the life of someone else and we feel so good inside. This is a story about a family. The mom and dad and two children. They went on vacation for three days and they were going to celebrate their dad’s birthday. They went to a state park and they were walking around the park having a wonderful time. Any time you go on vacation you find they have stands with food, drinks, and everything else and they came to one of those stands.

When they started on the vacation the dad said to the two kids, “Now you are each going to get twenty dollars. That twenty dollars has to last you for three days.” The oldest girl went over to a stand where they were selling various items and picked up a hat and put it on. Her dad looked at her and said, “You really look sharp.”

She said, “I want this hat.”

He asked, “How much does it cost?”

She said, "Twenty dollars."

He said, "I told you. You only get twenty dollars."

"But I want this hat."

"But you only get twenty dollars."

They argued back and forth and finally the father said, "You can buy the hat as long as you know that is all you are going to get."

So he gave her the twenty dollars and she went over and bought the hat. And she was as happy as can be. The family walked along and came to a lake and decided to sit down and rest and enjoy looking at the water. And while they were sitting there she turned to her dad. She took the hat off, put the hat on him and said, "Happy Birthday, Dad. I love you."

He just picked her up, hugged her, kissed her and tears ran down the father's cheeks. She knew exactly what she was doing, and she gave everything she had to wish her dad a happy birthday.

That is the human element that Jesus is teaching us. You might say, "Oh, well. Dad broke down and gave her another twenty dollars." No, he didn't. He was a dad and was going to teach her a lesson. This is the way it flows.

So now it comes to us in our gratitude. Are we giving everything back to God? During the time of Caesar, everything was given to Caesar. Jesus was simply saying, "Open your eyes people, everything that Caesar has belongs to me. Nobody can claim anything in this world. It all has come from God." All of a sudden you and I have to think, "Oh God, you know the situation and you really don't care." And God says, "Go do whatever you want to do. You received twenty dollars and that's all you're going to get. Someday you are going to come back and say, 'I made a mistake. What I really need is to have you in my life and in my heart.'"

You see, throughout the world all of us get into the Caesar mode from time to time. Maybe you don't think about it, but in 1913, before most of us were born, the United States started what we call the income tax. You were to pay one percent of your income to the government for the common good. One of the people involved in making the decision said, "I don't think we should do this. I just have a feeling that as time goes on, somebody is going to raise the tax to three percent and then five percent. You and I know the rest of that story. Today it is all the way up to 35 percent for some people or higher, and we just keep raising it more and more. And Caesar says, "Keep it coming folks."

Jesus says, “Go ahead and pay your income tax. I don’t care about the money. What I really want to know is — is there something in your heart telling you to follow me and to walk in my footsteps.”

There was a young man who was an excellent athlete and he was in the Olympics. He was in his twenties and always wanted to win the gold medal. He never won the gold but he won the silver. You know how it is, you are on television and you hold up your medal and he was very proud. Several years later a family came to him and their daughter needed surgery. The young girl came to the man and asked, “Is there any way you can help me? I went to the surgeon and I was told the surgery is going to cost \$126,000.”

The man replied, “I don’t know what to do. I don’t have \$126,000.” But he went to his dresser drawer and pulled out the silver medal he was awarded at the Olympics and went to a shop to find out what it might be worth now. The man who owned the place of business said, “This isn’t the gold, but I can give you \$19,000 for that silver medal.”

The man thought, “\$19,000 and the surgery costs \$126,000, I don’t know what to do.” But he thought about it and said, “I’ll take it.” The story got out in the community that this man had sold the silver medal he had received when he was in the Olympics. Two men from the community called him and said, “We have been following your story and we are so proud that you gave up something that was so meaningful to you — the silver medal that you would have liked to have passed on to your family. We want you to know that we want to help that child. The two of us will chip in the difference to reach the \$126,000 so the girl can have her surgery.” That is gratitude. The man thought, “I got the medal when I was young and it was fantastic. But as I grow older I realize there is something more to life.”

When you and I give with gratitude, we are giving back to God and that can awaken other people to do something themselves. All of us have to do that. Every person here could stand up and tell his or her own story. Jesus says, “For you to follow me and not Caesar, for you to know that everything you have comes from me, that is why I invite you to this banquet. I am going to give you the ultimate gift. I died on the cross for your sins, now I am going to give you my body and my blood. If you have that, don’t worry about a thing because whatever you do with your life is going to rub off on someone else.”

Then you too can say, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s. Don’t worry about it.” But always make sure that you give to God what belongs to God.

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