



29th Week of the Year 18th/19th October 2020 – World Mission Sunday
Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“I am the Lord, unrivalled. There is no other God besides me”

The hearings taking place for a new Supreme Court Judge in the United States at this time brings home to us the way in which Law and Conscience are not separate issues, as Amy Coney Barrett is tested on how her Catholic Faith may impact on her judgements. So, when we read in the Gospel for this Sunday about the Pharisees and the Herodians (normally enemies) coming together to question Jesus on the matter of taxes paid to Caesar and where he stands on it, we are into an important issue. How will he answer? Does he take the side of the Romans and their hated taxes or will he stand on the side of the popular interpretation of Jewish Law which opposed the Romans. The answer clearly comes down on the side of both: Jesus sees the necessity for taxes to meet the needs of the State and its costs in working for the Common Good, and at the same time he states we are to give “to God what belongs to God.”

Some would like to interpret the Gospel today along the lines of “keeping Religion out of Politics” and it certainly doesn’t do that. The taxes reflected in the image of Caesar will go to the State for legitimate purposes, but we are made in the image of God, and ultimately we belong to Him. And on this point of course rests the position the Church takes on so many current “political” issues. This is especially clear in the new Encyclical of Pope Francis Fratelli Tutti on Fraternity and Social Friendship – an appeal for Peace. Looking to a world that is fractured in so many ways Pope Francis is appealing for common ground where the dignity and worth of every human being is recognised. It is a fundamental document, an important contribution made by the Church to the future of society; a document worthy of everyone’s attention. Underpinning it are the words of Jesus in the Gospel this Sunday that we are to render to God what is God’s “we are made in his image, we belong to Him”.

Father Ferlita SJ in his commentary on the Gospel for this Sunday notes that the question of tribute to Caesar was put to Jesus at Passover. And, he tells the story of another Passover in 1943 –

“It happened during the Nazi occupation of Norway.

The doors of all churches are ordered closed.

People begin milling around aimlessly in the public square in front of the principle church.

They began singing “A mighty fortress is our God.”

Converging, they begin to move toward the church.

A detachment of armed Nazi soldiers stand on the steps.

The officer comes forward and pulls a woman holding a small child up to the step below him and puts a pistol to her temple.

“Start the second verse of that hymn,” he says, “and I’ll blow her brains out.”

There is stunned silence.

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese



Then, one lone voice is heard singing:

“Did we in our faith confide. Our Striving would be losing.”

Soon the whole crowd is singing.

How could they possibly do that, knowing that the officer meant what he said?

But, of course, it was the woman herself who started the verse.

From that moment the Nazi stranglehold was broken, and the resistance was born.

What was the woman proclaiming?

“Give to God what is God’s.”

Or, in the words of Isaiah in today’s first reading:

“I am the Lord and there is no other,

There is no God besides me” (45:5)

This wonderful story is reflected in many issues in our day, from the murder of Uighur Muslims in China, to the killing of Christians in Iraq, Syria and Nigeria.

On this Sunday when we pray for the Mission of the Church in the world. Let us pray that Pope Francis’ teaching on Fraternity may be heard the world over. And in this “One World Week” when we reflect on the theme for this year “It’s Our world: Let’s make it Better” let us reflect on the contribution our Faith can make to making our world a better place to live for everyone. We have a special mission in a world struggling to come through the Pandemic, to care for the most needy, and to share with all the vision we have that in Jesus “All will be Well”.

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