

TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME: Cycle "A"
Sunday, 18 October 2020

Every time I read God's Word, IT ALWAYS AMAZES ME
HOW IT SEEMS TO ADDRESS ITSELF TO ISSUES
UNIQUE TO THAT PARTICULAR MOMENT IN TIME.

- TODAY'S PASSAGE FROM MATTHEW'S GOSPEL IS A CASE IN POINT!
BECAUSE IT IS ONE OF THE FEW PLACES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT
WHERE JESUS ADDRESSES THE TOPICS OF:
 - MONEY
 - TAXES, and
 - GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE FINANCES OF ORDINARY PEOPLE.
- I THINK TO MYSELF: HOW RELEVANT!!!
- IN THE MIDST OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC AND
THE FINANCIAL HARDSHIPS CAUSED BY THE SPRING LOCK-DOWN,
to say nothing of the businesses that have closed or
those who've lost their job,
OUR ECONOMY IS FRAGILE-AT-BEST!
 - SURE → THE SPRING STIMULUS WAS HELPFUL,
and talks of another check,
ARE INTENDED TO GIVE AMERICANS A GLIMMER OF HOPE.
 - BUT THE PANDEMIC IS FAR FROM OVER ... and
CASES OF COVID ARE ON-THE-RISE AGAIN HERE IN OHIO.
- SO WITH ALL THIS UNCERTAINTY IN OUR LIVES,
as well as reduced (or even lost) incomes,
LOTS of people ARE WORRIED ABOUT
PAYING-THE-BILLS and FEEDING THE FAMILY.
 - FOR YEARS, WE ENJOYED A "BUBBLE OF PROSPERITY" (if you will).
 - BUT THAT BUBBLE HAS BURST, and
MOST, if not all, OF US
HAVE HAD TO MAKE ADJUSTMENTS TO OUR WAY-OF-LIFE!

SO, WHAT CAN TODAY'S GOSPEL

TELL US ABOUT OUR "PANDEMIC-INDUCED FINANCIAL HARDSHIPS?"

- TO APPRECIATE THE MESSAGE OF TODAY'S GOSPEL, IT'S CRITICAL THAT
WE UNDERSTAND THE PERSPECTIVE FROM WHICH JESUS SPOKE!

- ALL-TOO-OFTEN TODAY'S GOSPEL IS MISUNDERSTOOD:
 - SOME PERCEIVE JESUS' RESPONSE TO THE PHARISEES AS A DIVISION OF LIFE INTO TWO SEPARATE-AND-DISTINCT ARENAS:
 - THE POLITICAL ARENA,
BECAUSE JESUS SPOKE OF GIVING CAESAR WHAT IS HIS, and
 - THE SPIRITUAL ARENA,
BECAUSE HE DIRECTED US TO GIVE TO GOD WHAT IS GOD'S.
 - BUT - THIS 2-ARENA THEORY DISTORTS & WARPS JESUS' MESSAGE!!!
 - THE TRUTH IS: EVERYTHING BELONGS TO GOD; BOTH:
 - THE SPIRITUAL, as well as THE MATERIAL;
 - THE HOLY, as well as THE TEMPORAL.
 - SURE, CAESAR CAN MAKE SOME CLAIMS ON US,
and we're reminded of this every Apr 15th (or July 15th in covid),
→ BUT (whereas Caesar can only make "SOME" claims on us) ...
GOD LAYS CLAIM TO EVERYTHING ABOUT US!!!
 - ALL THAT WE HAVE, not just our money OR the way we use it ...
but everything about us ... BELONGS TO GOD!
 - GOD'S AUTHORITY, unlike Caesar's or the government's,
IS ALL-INCLUSIVE ... MEANING THAT:
EVERYTHING THAT I AM, ALL I POSSESS, and
ALL I ACCOMPLISH, IS A RESULT OF GOD'S POWER & LOVE →
not Caesar's but God's,
- FROM THIS PERSPECTIVE,
IT'S EASY TO APPRECIATE THAT JESUS, in today's Gospel,
WAS ASSERTING GOD'S ULTIMATE AUTHORITY
OVER EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE ... including over Caesar!
- BECAUSE OF THIS, I WOULD POSIT THAT
TODAY'S GOSPEL WOULD HAVE US CONSIDER TWO QUESTIONS :
 - 1 HOW MUCH DO WE NEED???
 - 2 IN WHOM DO WE PLACE OUR TRUST???

HOW MUCH DO WE NEED?

- THE TRUTH IS THAT YOU & I NEED A WHOLE LOT LESS THAN WE THINK!
 - PACKING FOR VACATION (when we could actually go on vacation) IS A PRIME EXAMPLE!
 - HOW OFTEN DID YOU PACK MORE THAN YOU WORE OR USED.
 - AND, EVEN IF YOU WORE IT ALL,
CHANCES ARE YOU COULD HAVE GOTTEN ALONG QUITE WELL WITH FAR LESS?
 - YOU AND I LIVE IN AN "ARTIFICIAL BUBBLE OF PROSPERITY; even in the toughest-of-times, we're better-off than most in our world!"
 - WE CONFUSE:
 - THE THINGS THAT WE CAN HAVE ... with ...
 - THE THINGS THAT WE ABSOLUTELY MUST HAVE!
 - WHEN THAT BUBBLE BURSTS or deflates,
IT GIVES US A CHANCE TO ASK WHAT'S REALLY IMPORTANT!
- OUR GLOBAL PANDEMIC HAS "DEFLATED THAT BUBBLE," AND CALLS US TO CONSIDER:
"WHAT'S REALLY IMPORTANT and ESSENTIAL?"
 - YOU & I HAVE HAD TO MAKE ADJUSTMENTS IN OUR WAY-OF-LIFE:
 - WE DON'T GO OUT AS OFTEN AS WE DID.
 - STORE SHELVES AREN'T AS STOCKED AS THEY USED TO BE.
 - WE ALL REMEMBER THE RUN ON TP BACK IN APRIL;
 - NOW THERE'S A SHORTAGE OF ALUMINUM FOR BEER & POP CANS
 - BECAUSE SUPPLY HASN'T KEPT UP WITH DEMAND,
PRICES HAVE GONE UP ... and, with limited incomes ...
WE'VE HAD TO CHOOSE BETWEEN
THINGS-WE-WANT & THINGS-WE-NEED
 - DESPITE OUR WORLD HAVING BEEN RESHAPED OVER THE LAST 9 MOS,
THE TRUTH IS THAT YOU & I CAN BE QUITE CONTENT AND HAPPY WITH A LOT LESS THAN WE'RE ACCUSTOMED TO HAVING.
 - WHILE WE MAY BE DOING WITHOUT SOME OF WHAT WE WANT,
WE STILL HAVE FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND INTEGRITY.
 - THESE ARE THE THINGS THAT BELONG TO GOD ...
AND, WHEN WE USE THEM ACCORDING TO GOD'S WILL,
WE CAN BE HAPPY—EVEN IF WE HAVE LESS MONEY & FEWER THINGS.
- SO → HOW MUCH DO YOU & I REALLY NEED?
FAR LESS THAN WE'RE ACCUSTOMED TO HAVING!!!

WHICH LEADS US TO THE SECOND QUESTION: IN WHOM DO WE TRUST????

- IF YOU LOOK AT UNITED STATES COIN OR BILL ...
YOU'LL FIND THE WORDS: "IN GOD WE TRUST."
- SURE, WE'D LIKE TO THINK THAT WE ALWAYS TRUST IN GOD.
 - BUT IN THE MONTHS & YEARS BEFORE THE PANDEMIC,
when things were going rather well financially & interpersonally,
WE PROBABLY ALSO PLACED A LOT OF TRUST IN MONEY.
 - WE MAY sub-consciously HAVE FELT THAT, if God didn't catch us,
WE'D STILL HAVE A COMFORTABLE FINANCIAL CUSHION TO CATCH US.
 - BUT, for many, THAT FINANCIAL CUSHION HAS GROWN THIN ...
and, for some, it's totally disappeared ...
AND THEY'VE COME TO REALIZE THAT
THE ONLY SOURCE OF ONGOING TRUST & STABILITY
IS OUR TRUST IN GOD!
 - GOD ALONE HAS:
 - MADE US,
 - SAVED US, and
 - PROMISED TO BE WITH US.
- GOD ALONE IS TRUSTWORTHY IN GOOD TIMES as well as BAD,
IN TIMES OF PROSPERITY AND IN THE MIDST OF A PANDEMIC.

SO, YES, THERE ARE CERTAIN THINGS THAT WE MUST RENDER TO CAESAR:

- WE MUST PAY TAXES, and
IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER WE'LL END UP PAYING
FOR THE TRILLIONS OF DOLLARS THAT HAVE BEEN USED
TO BOLSTER THE ECONOMY THROUGHOUT THIS PANDEMIC.
- BUT THOSE COSTS ARE NOT THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS IN OUR LIVES.
 - IF YOU & I LIVE OUR LIVES WITH UNCONDITIONAL TRUST IN GOD,
WE CAN STILL BE HAPPY ... even if we have less money ... BECAUSE ...
 - IF WE RENDER TO GOD THE THINGS THAT ARE GOD'S
HE WON'T LEAVE US DISAPPOINTED!!!