

**Homily – 29 Sunday A: Is 45:1, 4-6, I Th 1:1-5b, Mt 22:15-21**  
**World Mission Sunday**  
**Sacred Heart/St. Dominic Parish, Portland**  
**October 19, 2014**

Good morning! I am very happy to be with you this morning. Some of you have been gracious over these last few months in inviting me to come and visit. I am, of course, trying to get to all the parishes and churches of the diocese but that will take some time. I want to assure you that I have been enjoying traveling all over the state. Certainly I had no idea that Maine was such a large territory. It is. It is also beautiful, and filled with wonderful and welcoming people. I am very grateful for that.

I wanted very much to come here to Sacred Heart/Saint Dominic today for Mission Sunday. Here in this parish we have the newer communities, those who come from the Hispanic countries and the Africans from the Sudan and Somali. It seems appropriate to come here on Mission Sunday to celebrate the beauty of the Gospel and the call to share it with others in the midst of a community which is so welcoming. That, of course, is the heart of the Gospel. Once we come to know Jesus, and are touched by his love, we are called to become evangelizers. We want to bring the message of Jesus to others. Pope Francis has made that call to evangelize an important part of his message for this Mission Sunday: "Everyone should be able to experience the joy of being loved by God, the joy of salvation! It is a gift that one cannot keep to oneself, but it is to be shared." Mission Sunday, then, calls us first to know the gift we have in the Gospel, a gift that assures us of the love of God for each of us. At the same time we know ourselves as called to mission. Knowing we are loved we are called to share the message. Experiencing the beauty of the Gospel as it is lived in the immigrant communities that come here gives us reason to be grateful for the work of the missionaries who have brought the message of the Gospel to the different places in the world that are represented in these people.

As we come to celebrate Mission Sunday and deepen our appreciation for the work of bringing the Gospel to others I am also happy to know that this morning we will ask God's blessing on some people in our diocese who have volunteered to bring the message of the missions to the parishes and communities of our own diocese. They will be Mission Ambassadors, working to support the missions in our parishes.

I think the Scripture we have this morning helps us to reflect on the meaning of our missionary call as Christians and Catholics. The Gospel contains that wonderful quote which has had such an influence on the development of our understanding of the relationship between Church and State. Jesus, as we have seen the last few Sundays, is confronting his opposition.

The conversation includes the exchange where we hear that phrase which has echoed down the centuries as a principle. "Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God." We take that as a message of how we are to live our lives, mindful that we have responsibilities to the State within which we live as well as our God.

But that really was not the primary purpose of what Jesus intended. He was confronted by people determined to trip him up, and have him show them a reason to turn him over to the hated Roman government. Jesus simply answers them without making any such statement that they could hold against him. By reason of the fact that they are the ones who hold the Roman coin, they are showing themselves as profiting from the government they claim to want to be freed of. From the beginning of his ministry Jesus has wanted it to be clear that his purpose in coming among us was not about politics. It was about salvation, and continues to be. It is important that we hear and recall Jesus' full answer to the Pharisees. He told them, indeed to repay to Caesar what belonged to Caesar but he added, "and to God what belongs to God".

When I hear this story I am particularly drawn to the exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees as he asks for the Roman coin from them. He says to them, “Whose image is this...?” They answered, “Caesar’s”. In that question I am reminded of another important part of the scripture that would be well known to Jesus. Where else do we hear about an image in the Bible? Do you recall the book of Genesis which begins the Bible? We hear there in the account of creation that, on the sixth day, God created man and woman. “God created man in his image: in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them.”

When Jesus, then, suggests to the Pharisees that they are to give to God what belongs to God it is very possible that he has that passage in his mind. Each of us is a child of God, and each of us is loved by God. Each of us bears the image of God just as did the coin Jesus asked from the Pharisees bear the image of Caesar. If we are to give to God what belongs to God, it must include the respect and care we give to one another. In fact, everything belongs to God but, in a particular and unique way, we believe that we, you and I, are created in the image and likeness of God, and, because of that, have a special worth. As such, when we speak of governments, or communities, we must always keep in mind the reason for those communities. They are to enhance the life of the people whom they serve. To serve each other is the way we acknowledge the importance of each of us, and the way we profess faith in God’s goodness in creating each of us.

As we mark this Mission Sunday the Gospel shows us an important way in which we participate in the mission of the Church. Be conscious of the worth of each person in the community, and the way in which you can be of assistance to each other. Be a beacon of hope in the midst of the community. Let your care for each other, and the needs of others, be such a beacon that it will draw others to the beauty of the Gospel, and the wonder of the love of God we see manifested in Jesus Christ. Do all you can to strengthen families. Help them to be the place where children learn

of Jesus, and come to know of the uniqueness of each person. Help them to learn there the fact that we are, indeed, unique individuals but we are created to live in community and be of assistance to one another as a sign of our love for each other.

The Synod statement on families published just yesterday morning reminds us that Jesus walks with families as he does with each of us, even in difficult times.

“We offer you the words of Christ: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me” (*Rev* 3:20). On his journeys along the roads of the Holy Land, Jesus would enter village houses. He continues to pass even today along the streets of our cities. In your homes there are light and shadow. Challenges often present themselves and at times even great trials. The darkness can grow deep to the point of becoming a dense shadow when evil and sin work into the heart of the family.” The Synod leaders want to remind us that, in all things, even these dark moments, Jesus accompanies us.

The Synod reminds us as well that the parish is an important part of making that encounter possible as it gathers for the Eucharist:

“The high point which sums up all the threads of communion with God and neighbor is the Sunday Eucharist when the family and the whole Church sits at table with the Lord. He gives himself to all of us, pilgrims through history towards the goal of the final encounter when “Christ is all and in all” (*Col* 3:11).”

In his message for Mission Sunday Pope Francis ends with a prayer that can most appropriately be ours today as well: “Let us pray through the intercession of Mary, the model of humble and joyful evangelization, that the Church may become a welcoming home, a mother for all peoples, and the source of rebirth for our world.”