

29th Sun of Ord (MT 22:15-21)

22 October 2023

Like many of you I'm sure, I have had a really busy week. After spending a weekend with friends in North Carolina, I found myself challenged by a particularly lengthy "to do" list. There were two trips to Ohio; one day spent at the hospital with mom for testing and another day trying to untangle business concerns for my father as his power of attorney. On the home front, we are still trying to settle my mother-in laws affairs following her death two and half weeks ago. The grass needed to be cut and the oil had to be changed in one of the cars and I had the special opportunity to replace the tower in one of our toilets. Afterall, you can only put things like that off for so long. Of course I had my deacon duties to tend to as well and I did manage to fit in a little exercise on two occasions as well as dinner with some friends one evening. Amazingly, somehow I even managed to find time for a round of golf. Oh yeah, and then there's my wife. I tried to fit her in there somewhere, but was fairly unsuccessful as we really didn't spend much time together. Funny how those who are supposed to mean the most to us often find themselves as our last or least consideration. For that matter, other than Eucharistic Adoration this past Tuesday and Liturgy of the Hours, my spiritual life went largely ignored as well. Jesus addresses this conundrum in today's gospel.

Most of us are familiar with today's passage. We recognize the Pharisees as near constant adversaries of Jesus but you may be wondering who are these Herodians mentioned in today's gospel. These were men of wealth, influence and power who preferred to be ruled by their local King, King Herod, as opposed to the government of Rome. So why do the Herodians appear in this passage? I suspect it might have something to do with the coin that Jesus asks for in order to spoil the trap that has been set for him. In fact, he may have even reversed the trap to some

extent. For you see, Jewish law prohibited the Pharisees from carrying a coin with Caesar's image upon it because Caesar was considered a God in the Roman tradition. Consequently, had a Pharisee produced a Roman coin he could be guilty and bearing a false image. There would be no such complication for a Herodian if they produced the fateful coin that leads to Jesus' declaration: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."

Jesus offers this mantra to us as a call for balance in our lives. His followers had undeniable secular responsibilities, represented by Caesar in this illustration. Like those first followers of the Lord, we too, have many needs in our daily pursuits. We need to work. We need to take care of our health. We need time for family and friends and for learning and for fun. But we need to tend to our spiritual welfare, to our relationship with Christ, as well. So how might we accomplish all of this? We can meditate while we mow or avoid cursing while doing that repair. We can read scripture on the treadmill or stationary bike. We can look for opportunities to dual task or we can heed St. Paul's advice in his letter to the Thessalonians.

Paul doesn't deny the necessity of any of our earthly needs or tasks. In his letter, he compliments the people of Thessalonika for their works of faith, their labors of love and their enduring hope while no doubt completing the daily chores in their lives simultaneously. Note that Paul does not simply view faith, hope and love as abstract virtues. He ties these virtues to nouns that suggest activity: to work, to labor and to endurance. By imitation then, we too are called to approach our to-do lists with a similar spirit. We called to allow our faith in Christ and his resurrection to lead us to a higher appreciation and need for a sacramental life, especially the Eucharist. We are to conduct acts of charity not out of obligation but

out of love. And all our actions should be prioritized with the hope that they will lead us to eternal union with our heavenly father.

We will always prioritize what is most important to us individually. That's part of our human nature. But wouldn't it be great if we could approach those things that draw us closer to Christ with the same enthusiasm that we have for a football game or a vacation or even a Sunday morning in bed. If we can approach the labors of our lives with God always in our hearts then, and only then, will our spiritual nature and relationship with God thrive. Heck, we might even find time for our spouse.