

29th Sunday (A)

- Several years ago, either the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury or the Catholic Archbishop of Westminster preached at the commencement of the business year Mass & spoke critically about the myth and injustice of the theory operating in Western society about the benefits to the poor of trickle-down economics.
- After the Mass, the president of the businessmen's association commented with anger that the Archbishop should keep out of things he does not understand.
- There are people inside & outside the Church who think that Christ did not give the Church a mandate to speak about political or economic matters.
- They regularly quote the Gospel we have just heard to support their case.
- But if one knows & understands the context & meaning within which this was written, it provides no ammunition for those who want the Church to stay indoors, reflect on things 'spiritual', preach eternal truths, & sing hymns.
- In Jesus' day, we know that some people thought he was a Zealot.
- Zealots were a well-organised group who agitated for the end of the Roman occupation of Israel.
- One of the things Zealots did was withhold paying the Roman taxes.
- We can see why some people thought Jesus may have been a Zealot - he took the part of the poor, the sick, women & those who lived on the fringes of society; he attacked the religious authorities of his day & certainly stirred up trouble in many places he went.
- On the other hand he rejected violence, taught his followers to pray for their enemies & to return good for evil.
- Jesus showed us that the justice & equality God longs to see in the world comes from a community which is converted by love, not by weapons, fear, violence or revenge. Jesus was no Zealot.
- Rather than undermine civil authority, however, Jesus, in today's Gospel, supports it, but he does more - 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's' is followed by 'And give to God, what is God's', which encompasses all the Caesars of this world, all civil authorities & states.
- The sense that we as the People of God can split off our obligations to the Gospel from the State is as false as it's dangerous.
- We only have to think of some of the darkest chapters last century to see what happens when good, church-going people, like us, do not put their Sunday devotion in touch with their weekday politics. Evil can reign.
- Christian leaders, who are charged to proclaim & defend the Gospel, are obliged to use whatever forum necessary to declare that God's personal love encompasses everyone & everything under heaven.
- As the prophet Isaiah reminds us today, God calls each one of us by name.

- At times we may not agree with our religious leaders; we may think them ill-informed; we may even think they have overstepped the mark.
- If this is the case we should tell them, enable them to consider other perspectives & to broaden the basis upon which they make their judgments or use language that makes sense to people & resonates with what is the best in people's deeper selves.
- But we should never be seduced by those who want the Church sidelined from the mainstream of the debates that shape the way we live, the values we share, the laws we draft & the priorities we draw up for our wider human community.
- If the Church shows disinterest in any of this, it is untrue to the very things for which Jesus lived, died & was raised from the dead.
- But we as Church also need to speak in a language people understand.
- Religious people can all too often be using a dead language; holding onto dusty religious words & concepts that have no resonance in people's ears, not realizing that just saying those words louder isn't the answer.
- All the religious buzzwords that used to work 50 years ago no longer do.
- This spiritualized insider-language may give some comfort in an outside world that is changing, but it's just lazy religious shorthand, & it keeps ordinary people at a distance.
- People need us to speak in a language that they can understand.
- There's a message worth sharing, but it's hard to hear above what is often taken by people as narrow, anti-intellectual, simplistic & fundamentalist religious concepts that are out-of-touch with modern human life & insensitive to real, human struggles.
- Jesus calls us to full humanity, not to a religious belief system.
- People are not moved by religious concepts & reasons & we have not come to an understanding that living in a pluralist society means that people operate out of a wide amalgam of meaning systems.
- We need to talk to them plainly in ways that touch people's hearts in terms of human dignity, love, & joy, & forgiveness, & death, & peace.
- By all means we should give to Caesar all that Caesar is justly entitled to have for the sake of the common good.
- A higher allegiance, however, goes to God, in whose image we are created - the Divine image is in each of us.
- It's this divine in all others that we are duty-bound to care for.
- In breaking down the walls that divide, we are called to liberate not only the oppressed groups of people, but also those who oppress them.
- With open arms God invites everyone into an embrace of divine love.
- As God has embraced us, so we are called to embrace all others.