

Sunday: Ordinary 29 A
Mass during Parish Visitation

Corpus Christi Parish

22 October 2017

Dear Father Hamilton, Father Kairu, brothers and sisters in Christ of the Corpus Christi Parish family:

Introduction

In today's homily I have three things to say: about the parish visit which concludes today; about our call to evangelize the whole world as we celebrate World Mission Sunday; and, of course, a reflection, however, brief, on this morning's Gospel.

Parish Visit

As many of you know, this past Thursday evening I began a formal pastoral visit of your parish – the first such visit in the Archdiocese of a program which will take at least five years to complete. Father Hamilton, as Dean here in East Vancouver, graciously volunteered Corpus Christi to be the first parish visited.

For me, this experience of meeting so many people who are engaged in the life of your parish family has been encouraging and inspiring. Long known as a dynamic parish, you are becoming ever more so in your commitment to the Lord and his Church.

It became clear to me during the course of the visit that the dynamism of your parish, together with its school, is due in large part to the way you have embraced stewardship as the particular path – there

are other ways – which you have chosen to renew and invigorate parish life in all its dimensions. This is a long process of conversion but you are persevering and can already see the fruit which the good Lord is harvesting from your labours.

The four pillars of stewardship are guiding your renewal: that your parish become ever more prayerful, more interiorly formed by the teaching of the Gospel and the Church, more ready to serve both the parish and wider community, and ever more hospitable and welcoming, especially to those who do not yet consider the Church to be their “home.” I encourage you to continue along this path of getting closer to the Jesus, of ensuring a welcoming spirit in all you do, and in fostering increasing commitment among parishioners not only to be followers of the Lord but also to be missionary messengers of his love and mercy to the world around you.

World Mission Sunday

While the parish is where people gather to worship, be formed and to serve, the Catholic Church is a world-wide communion which has received from the Lord himself the Great Commission to proclaim the Gospel to all nations. That’s why throughout the world we are all celebrating World Mission Sunday, when the Holy Father directs our attention beyond our parish families to the vast numbers of people who do not yet know the love of God manifested in the life, death and

resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Mission at the heart of the Christian faith. As well as living the joy of this mission by witnessing the Gospel where each one lives and work, we are “called upon to support with affection, concrete help, and prayer, the missionaries who have gone out to proclaim Christ to those who still do not know him.”¹

This duty is a response to Jesus’ command to “go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15). Obeying this mandate of the Lord is not an option for the Church. It is our “essential task”²; for the Church “exists in order to evangelize.”³

And an enormous missionary task remains for us to accomplish.” In this regard, St. John Paul II, the secondary patron of our Archdiocese and whose feast we are celebrating today, noted that “the mission of Christ the Redeemer, which is entrusted to the Church, is still very far from completion,” and indeed, “an overall view of the human race shows that this mission is still only beginning and that we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to its service.”⁴ As a result, in words again of

¹ Francis, Angelus (22 October 2017).

² Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Ad Gentes*, 7.

³ Blessed Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14.

⁴ St. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 1.

St. John Paul, the Church needs at this time needs a “renewed missionary commitment,” because such activity “renews the Church, revitalizes faith and Christian identity, and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive. *Faith is strengthened when it is given to others!*⁵

So, dear brothers and sisters, we must find ways to take part in this pressing need to involve ourselves not just in our own parishes but also in missionary outreach: to have a heart for spreading the Gospel ourselves in our homes, families and communities; to *go forth* and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself.

“All of us are called to take part in this new missionary ‘going forth.’ Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the Gospel.”⁶

Today’s Gospel

Now to the promised third point of my homily.

Today’s Gospel is typical of many accounts of trying to ensnare Jesus, to catch him up – and once again he succeeds in escaping the trap.

⁵ St. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 2.

⁶ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 20.

Question

In the Gospel, the Pharisees and Herodians team up to discredit Jesus. They camouflage their ill will by masking it with a hypocritical flattery, hoping to catch Jesus off guard.

The trap comes in the form of a question: “Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?” (Mt 22:17).

If he said it was not lawful to pay the tax, he would anger the Roman officials who would then get rid of him as a rabble rouser, a revolutionary Zealot. The consequence? His public ministry would be cut short.

If, on the other hand, he replied that it was in accord with Torah to pay the tax, he would offend the ardent religious nationalists who hated everything about the Romans. By taking such a position he would show that he compromised his religious values, since money had the words “divine Caesar” imprinted on it. The consequence? His would be labelled an untrustworthy, even heretical Jew.

Answer

We all know Jesus’ surprising and wise response: “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s and to God the things that are God’s” (Mt 22: 21).

Jesus’ answer draws from his teaching that there are two kinds of kingdoms. There is the kingdom of this world, where Caesar does have

his say, and then there is the kingdom that Jesus spoke of in his preaching, one not *of* this world, but still found, like a bud in its early stage, *in* this world, the kingdom of heaven.

How does this affect us today? What lessons is the Lord proposing about how we are to relate to political authority? I believe there are two.

First, Jesus affirms that both political and religious obligations can be legitimately met. Paying taxes does not compromise one's duties to God – indeed a concern for justice and the common good requires this – and likewise serving God does not exempt one from the obligations of citizenship.

But something more profound and important is at stake here. Jesus implicitly subordinates the claims of the emperor to those of God. Yes, the coin bears the image of Caesar and can be legitimately given back to him. But what “belongs” to God? This is the real question.

We “belong” to God, for we bear his image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:26-27). So our highest obligation in life is to see to it that we return ourselves to God, giving ourselves back to him in gratitude and with increase for all he has done for us.⁷

⁷ Cf. Curtis Mitch and Edward Sri, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 286.

Conclusion

We now continue this Eucharistic Sacrifice, giving the Lord thanks and praise for all he has done for us. And today we might thank him especially for the gift of our parish family which supports us and asks for our ongoing and deeper commitment. But we should also ask for the grace to accept that we must find ever more effective ways to respond to the Lord's pressing appeal, echoed in the voice of the Church, that we must proclaim the Gospel to everyone.

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