

Sunday October 18th, Twenty-Ninth Sunday In Ordinary Time Year II

Good Morning from St. Bernadette's.

I hope everyone is keeping safe and well, and following all the guidance we receive to overcome these strange times, and continuing to pray for all our needs at this time.

Last night's mass went well under the tightened restrictions, but we must follow them if we are to keep our Churches open. Please let people know that the Church is open for our new mass times as usual. So let's get through this with united solidarity. And prayer.

Benjamin Franklin once said, *'There are only two certainties in life – death and taxation'*. Well, he might have been reading today's Gospel. Today we move away from the Parables and in Matthew 22:15-21 we see the Pharisees trying to outwit Jesus, to trap him into saying something he'll regret. Having frequently argued with him (and lost) on matters religious, such as fasting, working on the Sabbath, and pronouncing people's sins forgiven, the Pharisees now turn to secular, Roman laws to ensnare him, seemingly putting Jesus in a no-win situation; Is it permissible to pay taxes to Caesar? If Jesus says taxes should be paid he could be accused of siding with the Romans, and lose credibility with the oppressed Jewish people. If he said the taxes should not be paid he could be accused of inciting riot and rebellion, with possibly fatal consequences.

Jesus' answer does two things. The wonderful phrase 'give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar' reminds us that even as Christians, striving to be spiritual beings, we live in an unspiritual world and must accept lawful civil authority. As Christians, we should, in fact, strive to be the best of citizens. That doesn't necessarily mean agreeing with every governmental ruling, nor a mere acceptance of the status quo. But as Christian citizens we have the opportunity, in fact the duty to work for the common good, for Christian moral values and human decency and justice, doing our best by word and example, by the way we live our lives in the world to encourage the spread of the Gospel message. Hence, as well as 'giving back to Caesar' also give back to God what belongs to God. Rendering to Caesar may actually mean question the laws and the attitudes of Caesar, and perhaps in doing so we will find ourselves rendering to God at the same time.

But the second part of the phrase does ask to look at our spiritual lives too, what we are giving to God. Over the past few months we have had to be very creative in the way we serve God, and the way we worship God, especially with all our liturgical restrictions. But even if we feel unable to attend Church, the voice of prayer need never be silenced, and the past few months have also seen many and

varied opportunities for serving God through charity, and caring for others in need in whatever way we can.

The phrase give back to God what belongs to God is both familiar, as one of Jesus' most frequently quoted sayings, and also somewhat unfamiliar. Rarely do we think that we have to, are obliged to, do anything for or give anything back to God and his Church. And that's true. God gave us free will, and freely gave us his Son, never to demand anything in return, never to force us into returning homage or obeisance to him. Anything we are asked to do is an invitation to draw closer to Jesus and to more fully understand all that God has done for us, and continues to give us in the Sacraments, in answer to prayer, in the consolation of the truth of the Scriptures which we can delve into through prayer and meditation and study. Such wonderful opportunities each of us has to become more like Christ, and in fact to be Christ, to be the body of Christ in the world. And they are opportunities, invitations, gifts. There are no forceful reminders or threats. There are only the words of Jesus; a gentle call to return to God, ourselves, conscious that by the grace of our baptism as members of his family we ourselves, our whole lives in fact, ultimately belong to him. From Psalm 98:

*I will extol you, my God and King,
and bless your name forever and ever.
Every day I will bless you
and praise your name forever and ever.
Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised,
and his greatness is unsearchable
The Lord is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
The Lord is good to all,
and his mercy is over all that he has made.
The Lord is faithful in all his words
and kind in all his works.
My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord,
and bless his holy name forever and ever.*

Let us praise God as we sing 'All Creatures of Our God and King'.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WtT3SRnnG0I>

You eventually get to the hymn but you have to sit through a minute of Aled Jones walking round a zoo. 'Songs of Praise' likes to take hymn lyrics very literally.

Over In Australia, I can't believe that my niece Antonia is now eighteen, and this weekend graduated from High School – it's always difficult to remember that in Australia the school year is reversed, as they are in spring now, entering summer. My sister sent a couple of photos of the event, and that is

actually Antonia's school chapel! You could fit St. Bernadette's inside it! My sister wrote, *'The school chapel is one of the oldest in Australia, built by Mother Gonzaga Barry to educate the daughters of the Irish migrants who came during the gold rush in the 1850's No wonder all the girls come back for their weddings!'* Antonia stands next to a statue of Mary Ward, who was an English nun of the seventeenth century who founded the Sisters of Loreto, who in turn built many schools all over the world, including the one Antonia attended. Her work is celebrated in an exhibit in the museum of the Bar Convent in York, where she died during the English Civil War in 1645. She was mentioned by Pope Benedict during his UK visit, emphasizing the great work of female religious orders in England, and he declared her Venerable (one of the first steps to canonization) on 19 December 2009. Incidentally, two of her brothers were in the Gunpowder Plot. And also incidentally, we share a birthday, 23rd January. Anyway, this is one of the beautiful graduation prayers:

Dear God,

We pray for our graduates today and lift them before you.

We thank you so much for these we love

and for the work you are continuing to do in their lives.

They are a gift to us and to many others.

And during this season of new beginnings,

we ask that you would make their way clear.

We ask that you would keep their footsteps firm

and remind them that you are with them, always.

May they sense the freshness of your Spirit over their lives in amazing ways,

may they be strengthened, instilled with hope, for the new roads you have in store.

Our world is currently anxious, fearful and uncertain.

We pray our graduates are filled with your courage and strength,

that they may be a light to their friends and neighbours in this uncertain time. Amen.

And whether we are graduates or not, we can place all of ourselves, family and friends in that prayer, don't you think?

Do your best to make it the best Sunday possible.

This morning's mass was recorded and available on the YouTube at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VUzVtCt6M4A&feature=youtu.be>

Texts for mass can be found at <http://universalis.com/mass.htm>

Once again many thanks for all your return mails. Apologies if I don't reply immediately, sometimes they seem to get lost (or kind of bunched up). Any suggestions for ways to keep our faith and spirits up at this time are most welcome!

And remember, St. Bernadette's is not closed. We're just doing things differently for a while, until we are allowed to gather together once more, more stronger, more faithful, more loving, more creative, and more grateful for the amazing community that is St. Bernadette's.

With love and faith in Jesus.

Fr. P.