

Homily - Year 29 A - October 22, 2017

Politics is an interesting sport. We listen to some politicians present themselves as people who walk on water while the opposing side is portrayed as someone who would push the other under water and hold him there.

An underlying current of so many debates, not just political debates, can be summarized in but one word “gotcha!” Not only do they look for the other person to dig his own grave, but they are more than willing to say gotcha before they fill in the hole with dirt.

Our gospel passage today portrays a “gotcha” moment. The Pharisees and the Herodians approach Jesus. In political terms, this would be like Donald Trump and Nancy Pelosi joining forces for a particular purpose. The Jewish Pharisees opposed the tax because it recognized someone other than God as the king; the Jewish Herodians favored the tax because they wanted the Romans to continue to take care of the Jews.

So, they combined their strength to confront Jesus and hopefully catch him off guard so that they could both then say: “Gotcha.” and ultimately find a reason to eliminate or, at least, discredit him

But, they fail in their attempt. Jesus responds with his famous: “repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God.” Some have interpreted that saying as Jesus’ teaching about what we call today separation of Church and State. A by-product of such a weak understanding of Jesus’ teaching tells us that we must separate the requirements of our civic life from our duties vis-a-vis God.

We have seen further by-products of such a weak understanding of Jesus’ teaching. Life issues, especially abortion, the value of human life, morality, the meaning of the Christian vocation to marriage, the nature of war, human responsibility towards one another, the responsibility and nature of education have all become political or civil issues such that the teachings, the values, the instructions that come to us from God as revealed in scripture and as authentically taught by the Church must never be considered because that would be the interference of religion into life.

Jesus’ response contains a much greater message than a popular slogan. Jesus’ gospel confrontation urges each one of us to recognize to whom we ultimately belong and in whose image we have been created. Our allegiance, our fidelity must always remain focused on and obedient to the one true Lord and not to any modern-day Caesar.

If we truly believe that we are made in God's image, if we truly believe that human life itself comes from God and is destined to return to God, then these convictions must influence every dimension of how we live and permeate every choice we make. Would we not be just kidding ourselves if we make a so-called "civic" decision that would negate what our faith life tells us? These faith convictions must motivate our actions in our families, in our schools, in the workplace, in our political life, in our social life.

Isaiah says it best in the first reading: "I am the Lord and there is no other." The weekend activities that replace worship, the organizations that do not foster what we believe, the programs, courses, activities that do not teach what we consider sacred, and our leaders and policies that act contrary to our beliefs must all give way to that saying: "I am the Lord and there is no other." The apostle Peter in his first letter says it another way: "fear God, honor the emperor."

"Take a minute in the morning to sit with God, alone. Sixty seconds in the silence to let his will be known."