

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

In the gospel of today, we have the disciples of the Pharisees and Herodians asking Jesus a question: “Is it lawful to pay census taxes to Caesar or not?” It was a question with a double- ended trap. Those asking the question were not looking for an answer but for a way to trap Jesus. If Jesus said “yes,” He would be in trouble with the Jewish people. If He said “no,” He would be in trouble with the Roman rulers. So Jesus gave them an answer that astounded them and, at the same time, taught an important lesson. He asked them for a coin, and they gave him one that had the head of Caesar on it. He said, “Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.” The coin had the image of Caesar, but whose image do we reflect? In whose image and likeness are we created? Since we are created in the image and likeness of God, we belong to God first and foremost. We should always remind ourselves of this truth.

By birth we become the citizens of the country and by baptism we become the citizens of heaven. We have dual citizenship—we are citizens of the country of our birth and citizens of heaven. As Christians, we are to obey the government, even when it is pagan and non-Christian. A loyal Christian is always a loyal citizen. Failure in good citizenship is also failure in Christian duty. We fulfill our duties to our country by loyally obeying the just laws of the State, by paying all lawful taxes, and by contributing our share, whenever called on, toward the common good. As Christians, we are called to shape the moral decisions made in our society, to oppose bad moral choices and to support good moral decisions. We owe to God the building up of God’s kingdom, as we are first citizens of heaven.

We are starting the Stewardship of Treasure Campaign this week—“Fund the Future and Fulfil the Past.” It seeks your generous support for the operating expenses of next year and a sacrifice over and above your general tithing for debt retirement. This is going to help us to be where we need to be as a Catholic Community here in Bend. You will hear more about it in the coming weeks.

When I became a naturalized citizen of this country, I lost the citizenship of the country of my birth. I thought I could have dual citizenship. But I found out that India does not offer that option. It was not an easy decision also because I do not have any immediate family in this country. But while praying about it, the thought came to me that we are primarily citizens of God’s kingdom, and we need to make

sure that we do not lose that citizenship. Secondly, when someone becomes a priest, you give up your family—the Church becomes your family—becoming your fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters.

Since we belong to God first, we need to fulfill our duties to God by being faithful, loyal, active members of the spiritual kingdom, the Church, which Christ established on earth. Going to Mass on Sunday, praying together as individuals and families, paying great care in bringing up children in the faith and taking active part in the ministries of the Church are all indicative of the fact we are primarily citizens of God's kingdom.

God should get His share first before Uncle Sam gets his share, which shows that your primary membership is of God's kingdom. That is why stewardship demands that we calculate your 10% to God before taxes and not after taxes. Pope Francis says, "The first name of a Christian is, 'I am a Christian,' and the last name is, 'I belong to Christ.' " At the Eucharist, we remember what Christ did for us. He purchased us by the blood of His Cross. Let us put Him first in our lives!