

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A 2020- Matthew 22:15-21

World Mission Sunday, Ferntree Gully Newsletter

Over one billion Catholics all over the world observe today as the 89th *World Mission Sunday*. This annual observance was instituted 89 years ago in 1926 by a Papal decree issued by Pope Pius XI. Every year since then, the universal Church has dedicated the month of October to reflection on and prayer for the missions. Pope John Paul II once wrote: "We have, in World Mission Day, an excellent occasion for an examination of conscience with regard to our missionary obligation, and for reminding all the faithful of the Church, whatever be their function and place, that each one is involved in this duty." On World Mission Sunday, Catholics gather to celebrate the Eucharist and to contribute to a collection for the work of evangelization around the world. This annual celebration gives us a chance to reflect on the importance of mission work for the life of the Church. It reminds us that we are one with the Church around the world and that we are all committed to carrying on the mission of Christ, however different our situations may be. The greatest missionary challenge that we face at home is a secular and consumerist culture in which God is not important, moral values are relative and institutional religions are unnecessary.

On this weekend Sunday gospel, the question of dual citizenship is raised. But it is a question which is set as a trap for Jesus. This posed a dilemma for Jesus. If he said it was unlawful to pay tax, those who asked the question would immediately report him to the Roman government officials for being anti-Roman and his arrest would surely follow. If he said that it was lawful to pay the tax, he would stand discredited in the eyes of many of the people. Not only did the people resent the tax as most people resent taxation; the Jews resented it more for religious reasons. For a Jew God was the only king; their nation was a theocracy meaning that they did not give their allegiance to any human king or ruler. To pay tax to an earthly king was to admit the validity of his kingship and thereby insult God. Therefore, whichever answer Jesus gave, they assumed, would leave him open to trouble.

The answer of Jesus certainly surprised them. Instead of laying down hard and fast rules and regulations which he rarely did, he lays down principles as was usually the case. Here he lays down a very great and important one. Every Christian has dual citizenship. He is a citizen of the country in which he happens to live. To it he owes many things, security, public services etc. In a welfare state the citizen owes still more to the state, education, medical services, unemployment and retirement benefits. This places him under a debt of obligation. So, a Christian has a duty to be a responsible citizen. Failure to be a good citizen is failure in Christian duty. But a Christian is also a citizen of heaven and he is expected to live according to the commandments, the Law of God. If there is a clash or an opposition between the two, doing what we believe to be God's will must prevail.

Today is Mission Sunday and we are being reminded that each of us, and not just those who go abroad as missionaries, is expected to be a missionary wherever we are. Of course, we need to support those who go abroad in whatever way we can, either by prayers for them and for missionary vocations as well as by our financial support. But in many countries now which are beginning to have a higher standard of living more people have stopped going to Church and living by Christian principles. We do not judge them but it is all the more important we live out our missionary calling by a life of real Christian witness.

In the gospel when Jesus asks to see the coin the Pharisees and Herodian's, who were out to trap him, paid the tax with Jesus asked them, whose head was on it, whose name. This was another way of saying 'whose image is on the coin?' Obviously, it was that of the emperor Caesar. For us Christians it is not just an image stamped on a coin or something else external to us. We are told that we are created in the image and likeness of God. The image is stamped on our very being when we are created. This may have little effect for many people. It seems the image they live by is money, power etc. rather than what is stamped on their very being.

So, on this Mission Sunday what images do we live out of? Are we conscious enough of our image and likeness to God? Do we live our lives accordingly? Do our behavior and lifestyle show us to be missionaries so that others might be attracted to following Jesus because of us?

The world we live in is highly influenced by image. More and more there is a danger that we are an image conscious people. Some young people risk their lives due to anorexia or bulimia because the image presented is that of being very slim. Others will follow pop stars some of whom have died because of an overdose. With billions being spent yearly on advertising we can be seduced into living according to an image created by outside agencies.

A missionary must be ready at all times to sacrifice and surrender all (including his life) for God's mission. The joy of being a missionary does not actually come from how much material gifts one receives. Rather, it comes from how much lives one touches, and how much joy one is able to bring to others. It also comes from, how much love he is able to communicate to others through the gospel. The Good News this weekend is that God is telling us that we are incredibly blessed in being citizens of heaven, having his image and called to be real missionaries.