

**HOMILY, TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME “A”
CATHEDRAL OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL
OCTOBER 15 -16, 2011
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Some of us are more organized than others of us. One of my favorite, most organized groups is the group of persons who look at their desks and actually see wood. There is not one piece of extraneous material anywhere in sight. Simply amazing. Don't get me wrong; I have a certain type of organization. I look at my desk and see one two feet high pile of mail. Another pile has a great collection of articles and texts that I really need to read...sometime. And so on, and so on. Piles everywhere. I come by this honestly; my grandmother saved enough past issues of the St. Anthony Messenger to provide reading material to the western hemisphere. The dead give away that dealing with all this is absolutely necessary is when one of the piles topples over, smashing into one of the other piles. Something must be done! Immediately. Like a trip to the Dairy Queen!

Americans in particular are very comfortable with putting things in their proper categories. And we don't stop with “things”. We are very fond of putting people in their proper categories, categories designated by our own likes and dislikes. One of the groups we categorize very easily is the group of those folks who threaten us in some way or another. Such was the case with Jesus of Nazareth.

The gospel story proclaimed today is a window on the world of Jesus' day. The political atmosphere was charged, and sparks would fly igniting fires of oppression and persecution. On the one hand, there were those who made certain accommodations with the Roman government in an effort to just try to get along. They didn't necessary want the Romans in their land, but they were willing to compromise in order to keep a fragile peace. On the other hand were those who bitterly resented the presence of the Roman occupational forces, and even more

bitterly resented the imposition on Jews of a Roman tax sending their hard earned money to some dictator thousands of miles away. One thing these two groups had in common was their hatred of Jesus. Jesus was like them, but not like them. He was a Jew, but preached a kind of freedom that seemed to transcend traditional religious observance inviting all persons.... rich and poor, male and female, Gentile and Jew.... to become sons and daughters of His heavenly Father, a practice that in itself was scandalous to the ears of his fellow Jews.

So they overlooked their differences in order to try to trick Jesus into taking a stand that would publicly embarrass and discredit his teaching. If he sided with the “get along” group, he would seem to reject his own Jewish beliefs. If he sided with the zealots, he would appear to be a revolutionary subject to arrest by the Romans soldiers. What to do?

Once again Jesus transcends the narrow confines of these choices, and moves the argument to a new level. Jesus avoids the temptation to pit God against government. Instead, Jesus reveals the mystery of His Incarnation once again, by demonstrating that following God must take place in Caesar’s world. Just as God became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, living as God among us in human form, so, too, must we live Godly lives in the midst of our very human world. Doing anything less would pit our world against God’s world, government against God, human activity against God’s activity. In another place in the Bible, Jesus makes the emphatic point that loving God and hating one’s neighbor is impossible. We do not live two separate lives. As baptized persons, baptized into the life of Christ, baptized as members of Christ’s body, the Church, we are called to live in this world every day according to the two great commandments, love of God and love of neighbor. Not love of God **OR** love of neighbor. We look to Jesus Christ who in himself was human and divine to see a role model for ourselves who must

integrate in our lives the hope and promise of divine love in the midst of our very human world.

If true conversion of our hearts is to take place, we must seek to reconcile all aspects of our lives to the Gospel. This is how we are to render to Caesar in God's world.

In recent history, there has developed an alarming apathy among citizen to exercise their constitutional rights and responsibility to vote. This is a shame. It is a rejection of Jesus' directive to render to Caesar and to render to God. As in every election, indeed, as in any choice we make, we take seriously the two greatest commandments, to love God and to love our neighbor, and we witness by our words and deeds how we live in Caesar's world the love of God, the creator of the whole world.

In the end, there is really only one category that matters, and that is the category of our membership in the Kingdom of God. Jesus reminds us: "seek first the kingdom of God, and all else afterwards". It echoes the prophecy of Isaiah in the first reading today as he quotes the Lord who says: "I am the Lord your God; there is no other." This seeking doesn't begin at the front door of heaven; it begins now, here in Caesar's world. God has become one like us in Jesus Christ in order to show us how to do this. It may not always be easy or perfectly clear. It may not always be possible without some degree of sacrifice. However, it will be our path to authentic discipleship. We would use our energies in a much more Godly manner if we focused on what we have in common rather than on what divides us whether those divisions are in our city, our neighborhoods, our parish or even our families.

The trick is not to get tricked, not to get tricked into living in several different worlds, but to live as citizens of heaven even in this world.