

## **Televised Mass at San Fernando Cathedral – October 18, 2020**

Dear sisters and brothers, every time we come as a community to celebrate the Eucharist, we certainly come to be nourished by our Lord. He gives us His Word and His own Body and Blood so that nothing can lack in our relationship with Him and with our neighbors. But also, every time we come around the Lord's table, we are called to grow in our Christian commitment, in our vocation to go out into the world to bear fruit that is pleasing to God.

The difficulties of our world today seem to be asking even more from us. After seven months of being restricted in many of our activities by this pandemic, we see more of our Christian brethren being hurt in many ways. Emotionally, financially, socially, and even spiritually... people in our communities are hurting. You and I are called to bring them hope. But as if all this were not enough, we are also going through times in which we see division, lack of charity, and accusations of all sorts. Partly, this has increased as we are going through election season. It seems really fitting that today we come to listen to this gospel story.

This discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees is used by many to suggest that those of us who are active in our faith, should keep this aspect of our life out of the political world, as if these can actually be two completely independent areas of our life. But all of us, in one way or another, acknowledge that these are not two separate spheres of our existence. Our behavior and choices in society affect deeply the way in which we live.

The Herodians and Pharisees in today's story, who pose the question of our Lord about paying tax to Cesar, are not really seeking guidance in making a difficult moral decision. We know that they are simply trying to trap Jesus into a no-win situation with a tricky question that cannot be easily solved. In asking Jesus to take a stand on this question, the Lord's opponents are trying to discredit him. If he supports paying the tax, then he would be necessarily seen as cooperating with the enemy, and his credibility as a prophet coming from God would be compromised. If he replies that the tax should not be paid, then he places himself as a clear enemy of the Romans.

The Lord finds a clever way through these two opposite possibilities: one should give the coins, which were stamped with the face of the emperor, back to Cesar, since they belong to him. But then he turns the focus towards "what belongs to God", which really for all those of us who are believers, is absolutely everything. His enemies cannot reply to this; they depart to wait for another time to test him.

Let us focus on the positive side of Jesus' answer: as Christians we should truly strive to give everything back to God, to make all things go according to the principles of His Kingdom, and to work hard to allow His truth and peace to be part of the structures that govern our life.

In his new encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis gives us a clear example of how our actions should work through love at different levels. "There is also a "commanded" love, expressed in those acts of charity that spur people to create more sound institutions, more just regulations, more supportive structures. It follows that it is an equally

**indispensable act of love to strive to organize and structure society so that one's neighbor will not find himself in poverty. It is an act of charity to assist someone suffering, but it is also an act of charity, even if we do not know that person, to work to change the social conditions that caused his or her suffering. If someone helps an elderly person cross a river, that is a fine act of charity. The politician, on the other hand, builds a bridge, and that too is an act of charity. While one person can help another by providing something to eat, the politician creates a job for that other person, and thus practices a lofty form of charity that ennobles his or her political activity.”**

**My dear sisters and brothers, let us all be involved in responding to the invitations of God's Kingdom. Let us work in creating structures that respect human dignity at every level. May Our Lady of Guadalupe help us to be courageous in building bridges that help us to recognize the value of human dignity and the need to serve those who are most vulnerable, so that we can truly and effectively bring all things back to God.**