

Proper 24

Sunday, October 16, 2011

Homily: Thomas Graf

“May the Lord be in my heart and on my lips, that I might worthily proclaim His Holy Word.”

“Then he said to them: ‘Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s and to God the things that are God’s.’”

We are told that, “When they heard this, they were AMAZED, and they left him and went away.”

But.....were they JUST amazed???? Were they at all CHANGED???

Who were those who confronted Jesus? There is apparently a coming together between the Pharisees and the Herodians. As some would say, a pretty UNLIKELY ALLIANCE. The Pharisees were a strict, legalistic group that held FIRMLY to the LAW OF MOSES. The HERODIANS, on the other hand, were those who endorsed and supported ROMAN RULE over Israel. We actually see very little of the Herodians in the NT---this is just one of three places. Actually, the Herodians were often referred to as the ARCH ENEMIES of the PHARISEES. So, why this UNLIKELY union at this point in time?

Sounds to me like that old saying, “Sometimes Politics and Religion can make some pretty strange bedfellows.”

What is their INTENT???

We are clearly told that they want to ENTRAP Jesus. We need to look a little closer at the Greek origin of this particular word---which is not just simply to entrap, but to SET A SNARE AS TO CATCH AN ANIMAL. Thus, we see that the intent is clearly there, well planned, thought out and implemented. Interestingly though, the PHARISEES do not come themselves, they send their disciples/students. However, they send them with much PREPARATION/COACHING.

And they QUESTION Jesus....but event their questioning is done in an arrogant and hypocritical way.

“IS IT LAWFUL?” Their question is certainly not about ROMAN LAW....Everyone knew quite well that it was indeed the LAW OF THE LAND that tribute/taxes MUST be paid to the emperor. Such continues to this day...we know the law, we know the two things we cannot escape...DEATH and PAYING TAXES!!!

“IS IT LAWFUL?” is a question about TORAH LAW!!! Does the Torah permit a faithful and obedient Jew—like the PHARISEES to pay the ROMAN TAXES???

Jesus knows all too well their EVIL INTENT-----thus he responds---YOU HYPOCRITES!!! He then asks them to show him the coin that was used for paying the tax---which was a specific coin that had the image of the ROMAN EMPEROR and on one side clearly was written---TIBERIUS< EMPEROR, SON OF GOD.” Thus the coin violates the commandments to have no other Gods except the Lord, and the commandment to not make any images of God. Jesus traps his adversaries when he asks them to

produce this special coin---such demonstrates their true HYPOCRACY---how could a devout Jew , and a leader at that, have such a coin on their person??

In essence, through this simple ACTION, without WORDS, Jesus seems to say: "I DO NOT POSSESS THE COIN USED TO PAY THE TRIBUTE, YET YOU, WHO SEEM SO TROUBLED ABOUT IT DO CARRY AND USE THE COIN." Thus, if they are so ready to acknowledge Caesar's SOVEREIGNTY when it is to their advantage, then they should know they have to RENDER to CAESAR when he demands their tribute.

GIVE THEREFORE TO THE EMPEROR THE THINGS THAT ARE THE EMPERORS AND TO GOD THE THINGS THAT ARE GOD'S.

POLITICS.....POLITICS.....Jesus had to deal with it then, and we have to deal with it today.

What's been in the news lately????

OCCUPY WALLSTREET!!! OCCUPY WASHINGTON!!! OCCUPY EVERYTHING!!!!

THE OCCUPY MOVEMENT!!!

OCCUPY----To engage the attention of.....or the energies of.....

MOVEMENT---A coordinated group action focused on a political/social issue.

Jesus dealt with it.....and we still have to deal with it.....

(HOLD UP BANNER FROM THE RALLY, and begin to cheer loudly)

"WE GOT SOLD OUT, THE BANKS GOT BAILED OUT!"

"WE ARE THE 99%"

"THE RICH SIP CHAMPAGNE WHILE THE WORLD LIVES IN PAIN."

"WALLSTREET HAS THE REAL WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION."

When reflecting on today's readings, certainly the phrase that stood out to me was "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." However, the recent gatherings I WALLSTREET and throughout the world also seemed to stand out. Heck we were even going to have an OCCUPY MIAMI on Saturday.

So.....I called my wife Isabel (Who's in NY this week) and told her that I was thinking about attending the rally of OCCUPY MIAMI down at BAYFRONT PARK. She immediately said, NO WAY!!!! YOU'LL GET YOURSELF ARRESTED" SO, I put those plans on hold. However, not 2 minutes after we spoke, she called back and said, you know what, your daughters say, "GO FOR IT DAD!!!" even the grandkids were saying THAT'S COOL GRANDPA.....GO GET ARRESTED!!!! SO, guess where I was yesterday afternoon???

I WENT, I SAW.....and I WAS AMAZED!!! Maybe kind of like what was said in the Gospel today, I did leave AMAZED and hopefully a little CHANGED.

I was AMAZED by the NUMBER OF PEOPLE THAT WERE THERE---the media says over a THOUSAND, but I think there were at least TWO THOUSAND!!! THE DIVERSITY OF PEOPLE---There were little kids, someone who looked like he was 100 years old, teachers, mail clerks, even some of the people who had marched in the BREAST CANCER AWARENESS earlier. THERE WERE PEOPLE REPRESENTING many and varied INTERESTS, CONCERNS, ISSUES-----it was like a QUILT WORK OF PERSONS!!!

So many BANNERS/PLACCARDS/SAYINGS:

“IT IS WELL ENOUGH THAT THE PEOPLE OF THE NATION DO NOT UNDERSTAND OUR BANKING AND MONETARY SYSTEM, FOR IF THEY DID, I BELIEVE THERE WOULD BE A REVOLUTION TOMORROW MORNING.” (HENRY FORD)

“FIRST THEY IGNORE YOU, THEN THEY LAUGH AT YOU, THEN THEY FIGHT YOU, THEN YOU WIN!” (GHANDI) (Doesn't this sound familiar? What happened to Jesus?)

“YOU MAY SAY THAT I'M A DREAMER, BUT I'm NOT THE ONLY ONE. I HOPE SOME DAY YOU"LL JOIN US, AND THE WORLD WILL BE AS ONE.” (JOHN LENON)

“I LOOK FORWARD TO A GREAT FUTURE FOR AMERICA. A FUTURE WHERE OUR COUNTRY WILL MATCH:

--IT'S MILITARY STRENGTH WITH OUR MORAL RESTRAINT.

--IT'S WEALTH WITH OUR WISDOM.

--IT'S POWER, WITH OUR PURPOSE.

(JOHN F. KENNEDY)

There were several individuals that seemed to stand out for me during the rally. There was one YOUNG MAN who didn't appear to be any kind of leader....he clearly seemed to be a FOLLOWER. He held no banner, no placard, and no sign. He was real good at REPEATING what some of the LEADERS said, like a parrot. However, later during the event, I saw this YOUNG MAN again, now he was carrying a SIGN (That he clearly made from cardboard) he was holding it high and proud, and it said:

“PEOPLE ARE NOT DEFINED BY THE SIZE OF ONE'S WALLET, BUT BY THE SIZE OF THEIR HEARTS. ASSUMPTIONS ARE THE MOTHER OF MISTAKES!”

Boy was I wrong, boy did I make assumptions----perhaps he too was touched and changed.

There was also a young college student, holding a flower in her hand, with a peace sign on her tie died t-shirt. Her sign said:

“WHEN THE POWER OF LOVE OVERCOMES THE LOVE OF POWER, THE WORLD WILL KNOW PEACE.”

In our gospel today, Jesus' words are somewhat ambiguous. However, as one writer suggests, his ambiguity is more than a clever maneuver to evade entrapment. It admits the moral ambiguity that permeates our political and social existence. People cannot avoid any and all obligations that may, in their full effects, dishonor or grieve a merciful God, can they? Anyway, the needs of the world demand that Christians stay deeply engaged in it. In our increasingly complex

existence, Jesus' statement about attending to the 'things that are God's' prompts us to recognize how all-encompassing that category is. It overshadows the rights and allegiances any empire might demand for itself. Furthermore, Jesus' statement regularly summons us to REPENTANCE toward changes in how we live and toward more undivided loyalties.

Thus, it's not REPUBLICAN OR DEMOCRAT, ITS NOT THE TEA PARTY OR THE OCCUPY MOVEMENT!!!

On my way home yesterday evening, I made a wrong turn, and ended up in an area nearby the STADIUM---a NOT TO RICH AREA!!! When I was stopping at a light, there was a SOLE MAN standing on the corner, carrying a SIGN.....it said:

"JESUS LOVES YOU.....HE IS COMING....REPENT!"

What a COINCIDENCE-----PROVIDENCE!!!

I continued to reflect on the drive home, I thought of how at this point in the gospel, Jesus has had a number of confrontations with the LEADERS....Jesus continually accuses them of not truly RENDERING to GOD the TRUE FRUITS....THE JUST WORKS DUE GOD...Such challenge would eventually lead to Jesus' POLITICAL demise....DEATH ON THE CROSS. However, perhaps THEY & WE should WORRY LESS about what is due Caesar and pay more attention to GIVING GOD HIS DUE!!

Our God, who has the full authority and Power. As such, maybe we should keep in mind that great entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem on that donkey.....a time when there was another gathering/rally.....maybe we could say-it was OCCUPY ROME, when the crowds chanted together:

"HOLY, HOLY, HOLY, LORD GOD OF POWER AND MIGHT, HEAVEN AND EARTH ARE FULL OF YOUR GLORY. HOSANNA IN THE HIGHEST. BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD, HOSANNA IN THE HIGHEST!" AMEN!