

Fr James' homily for the Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Isaiah 45:1-6
Second Reading: First Letter to the Thessalonians 1:1-5
Gospel: Matthew 22:15-21



When we pay our taxes, we are all making compromises. St Paul tells us in a number of places that it is right to pray for the Emperor, and for the powers that be who organise the basic security and structure of society, even though we are not totally in harmony with what the state stands for. When we pay our taxes we are inevitably including funding for things that are not in accord with the truth of the faith - for example in some things that the NHS provides. This is always a painful compromise. What is vital, then, is that alongside this we are living a life of integrity seeking to change the very structures with which we have compromised.

Jesus shows up that this is what inevitably was happening in Jerusalem as the Pharisees seek to “set a trap” for him. They carry the coins of Caesar in their pockets and pay the necessary taxes to survive. They are making a difficult compromise and trying to appear as though they do not. However, they are also making another and far more unworthy compromise as the Gospel today tells us that the Pharisees make an alliance with the Herodians, with whom they would not normally be associated for fear of ritual contamination, just to be able to trap Jesus.

And, knowing all this they make a rather unobvious reference to Jesus' reputation and honesty, in a bid to show him to be as compromised as they are themselves.

We have to live alongside the world as it is, and sometimes compromise with it, but always with the aim and the intention of transforming it and not affirming it. So too Isaiah points out how God will use the outsider and pagan king Cyrus to aid the cause of his people, but with the intention that Cyrus and all the world might also eventually be included in his people....He is not affirming the King's paganism.

What truly matters in all we do is that we seek first to give back to God what belongs to him: our love and worship and service and friendship. Right thinking, moral behaviour and good works will surely follow in that wake.

Last week a rather extraordinary and joyful thing happened for the Church in the beatification in Assisi of the young man Carlo Acutis, who died in 2006 of Leukaemia. (*We've put some links on the website so you can find out more*). Carlo in this world was an ordinary teenager with a wonderful devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and

consequently an understanding of what to put in first place: worship of God; use of the sacraments; friendship with Jesus...and a host of good works followed on. When he fell ill, his illness would take his life in just a few days, and even this he gave to God joyfully for the salvation of the world. Blessed Carlo is a saint for today. He loved computing and technology and used it to spread the Gospel (*see the websites he created to teach about the Eucharist*). His devotion converted even his own parents, who were lapsed from the faith. His confidence was firmly that God, who in Jesus unites heaven and all creation, will use all things for good and for eternity.

Let us be aware of the compromises that we make, and why we make them. Let us be ever prayerful about the changes that need to be made to our society that it might be ordered after the heart of Jesus. Let us use everything around us and all we are to build up what is of true value. Let's ask the prayers of Blessed Carlo Acutis to help us see our lives aright.

Amen.

Fr James and Fr Tom wish you a blessed Sunday. Keep safe and well, and never hesitate to pick up the telephone and be in touch. See you in church I hope! Keep in close contact with the website for news of how practical plans are developing.

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