

Read

Isaiah 45:1, 4-6

Psalms 96:1, 3, 4-5,
7-8, 9-10

1 Thessalonians 1:1-5b

Matthew 22:15-21

Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 22, 2023

REFLECTION

The Pharisees in today's reading from the Gospel of Matthew are trying to trick Jesus and get him into political trouble. Roman rule was not always welcome, yet civil unrest about it was forcefully punished. The Pharisees wanted Jesus to say that the only law that should be followed is God's law and so there was no need to pay Caesar the taxes that were due, but Jesus knew what they were up to. God's law is about love, mercy, and forgiveness. God's love is about choosing to support the poor and lonely people in the world. The question the Pharisees were asking Jesus would be like asking your teacher if you had to study for your science exam because it doesn't have to do with showing God's love. Jesus said, "Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God" (Matthew 22:21). In other words, God calls you to love your neighbor as you would want to be loved *and* to study for your science exam.

ACTION

Sometimes it is hard to incorporate your faith into your daily life. You might speak of loving God but only think about God during Mass on Sunday or during youth group. This week, think of at least one way you can incorporate God into your regular activity. It could be as simple as choosing to pray every morning as you brush your teeth, to something more elaborate, such as putting aside some of your money each month to donate to a charity that you would like to support.



Charity Navigator rates the best charities to donate to and allows you to search for particular causes: <https://www.charitynavigator.org>

QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ If you could create your own charity organization, what would it be?
- ❖ What are the things that distract you from following the law of God?



October 22, 2023

TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #145A

Isaiah 45:1, 4-6

Psalms 96:1, 3, 4-5, 7-8, 9-10

1 Thessalonians 1:1-5b

Matthew 22:15-21

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

In today's Gospel, we find the Pharisees trying to trap Jesus through his speech. They know he is a great teacher and that this would be a way they could trap him into saying something that contradicts their local laws. Coming to him will ill intent, they ask him if it is lawful for them to pay the census tax to Caesar. We are often faced with these kinds of situations, where we might know what the right answer is, but we also know that there might be consequences no matter which answer we choose. Jesus teaches us that we belong to God, but also that part of our discipleship is being good stewards and responsible citizens. By acting in such a way, we represent the love of God.

Q FOCUS: *Good citizenship is part of holy discipleship.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

On October 22, the Church celebrates the feast day of St. John Paul II. He was born in 1920 in Poland. He was ordained a priest in 1946 after studying for the priesthood in an underground seminary due to the political and religious unrest during World War II. He was chosen as pope in 1978. His pontificate lasted twenty-seven years; during that time, he contributed greatly to the life of the Church, its relations with other religions, and inspired many people to a deeper faith. For example, he initiated the first World Youth

Day so that more young people would be drawn to an encounter with Christ and be moved by their faith.

Church Teaching Connection

"Jesus draws a more radical and vital question for each of us, a question we can ask ourselves: *to whom do I belong?* To family, to the city, to friends, to work, to politics, to the State? Yes, of course. But first and foremost—Jesus reminds us—you belong to God. This is the fundamental belonging. It is He who has given you all that you are and have. And therefore, day by day, we can and must live our life in recognition of this fundamental belonging and in heartfelt gratitude toward our Father, who creates each one of us individually, unrepeatable, but always according to the image of his beloved Son, Jesus" (Pope Francis, Angelus Message, October 22, 2017).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Matthew 22:15-21

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the sign of the cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

The Pharisees went off and plotted how they might entrap Jesus in speech. They sent their disciples to him, with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are a truthful man and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. And you

are not concerned with anyone's opinion, for you do not regard a person's status. Tell us, then, what is your opinion: Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?" Knowing their malice, Jesus said, "Why are you testing me, you hypocrites? Show me the coin that pays the census tax." Then they handed him the Roman coin. He said to them, "Whose image is this and whose inscription?" They replied, "Caesar's." At that he said to them, "Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

The beginning of the Gospel today shows us that not everyone liked the message Jesus was preaching. We have seen how Jesus challenges the religious leaders, their teachings, and their personal behaviors. We hear how the Pharisees were trying to catch him saying something that would incriminate him or outrage his disciples. They rely on the common law of the day to form their deceitful question of where Jesus' loyalty lies.

► **Have you ever felt like you were in between a rock and a hard place? Have you ever had to choose one way or the other, but you were not sure which you would choose?**

► **What helped you to make your decision? How did you feel about the choice you made?**

The Pharisees were hoping that they were about to put Jesus in that type of situation but of course, Jesus knew their plan and was ready for them. So they asked him, should they pay their census taxes to Caesar or not? What they are really asking him is who his allegiance is to. Does Jesus think he is above

the law? Is his Father in heaven above the law? Will he say that Caesar holds no power over him? The way he answers this question will have direct implications for him and his followers and may bring him imprisonment and possibly death.

Sometimes these big decisions can weigh on us. We want to do the right thing, but we are not exactly sure how to accomplish that. Maybe something holds us back. Maybe we need to look at the bigger picture. Jesus' response to the question gives us some helpful hints about how to handle these situations. Jesus knows that they have coins on them, so he asks to see one. He simply notes that since Caesar's head is on the coin, it must belong to him, so they are to pay to Cesar what is his. The Pharisees are not able to argue with his answer. Rather than getting upset about being tricked and responding in anger or in a hurry, Jesus engages them in dialogue. They themselves admit that it is Caesar's coin, so they can't really argue with Jesus' final answer.

► **What are some tips you have from your experiences with situations like this that you can share with us?**

Jesus' interaction in today's Gospel also teaches us to find a balance in the way we live as Christians in the world. Throughout his ministry, Jesus teaches us that we are called to be good stewards of what we have and upright citizens in the community in which we live. While our citizenship in heaven is more valuable than our citizenship on earth, we must still treat our communities with their due respect. Jesus' words in today's Gospel call our attention to the important truth that just because we pay our taxes to a government, it does not mean that we give them our soul. In fact, we are able to live according to worldly governance because God gives us the strength to live in community with one another. May we remember that our relationship with God inspires us to be responsible citizens in our society. When we give our hearts and souls to God, we want to share that with others.

► **In what ways have you given yourself to God? How do your actions show this?**

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 50.

To be a good disciple involves being a good citizen.

Have courage to give your life to Jesus.

God's wisdom will guide you when you ask him for it in prayer.

Act on the Word

Whose Team Are You On?

You will not need any materials for this activity.

Divide the room into two halves. You are going to present a series of two choices and ask the teens to choose which team they are on. They should change sides according to their preference. Tell the teens that if they prefer the first choice you give they should go to the left side of the room, and if they prefer the second, they should go to the right side of the room. You can add to the following list with additional choices.

- * Coke or Pepsi
- * Baseball or basketball
- * Beach or snow
- * Math or English
- * Sleep in or stay up late
- * Sweet snacks or salty snacks
- * Work ahead or procrastinate

After you've played several rounds, have the teens gather to reflect on the activity. Encourage them to think about how people are attached to many things in their lives. For example, many people are very loyal to their schools. If they are in a competition of some sort, they cheer for them. They proclaim their

allegiance by proudly with hats and shirts with the team's name on them. Go Wildcats! Go Bears! Have the teens share with one another some of the groups they are loyal to. This could include towns, schools, teams, families, clubs, activities, parishes, civic organizations, and so on. After a couple of minutes, have the teens form small groups with about three people in each group. In these groups, have them talk about the ways they can tell if someone is loyal to one of the organizations they brainstormed. For example, a fan of the Tigers baseball team might have a Tigers hat, a Tigers logo on their car, they might play on the team, or they might know the fight song. After each small group has brainstormed some identifying factors for their organization, have the young people come back together in the large group to talk about how someone might know they are a Christian or a Catholic. At the end of the discussion, remind the teens that no matter where they are or what they are doing, they have the opportunity to show their allegiance to God in all their actions.

Closing Prayer

Almighty ever-living God,

your Word continues to call us to

faithfulness to your commands.

Grand that we never lose sight of your

saving love for us

and always strive to do your will above all else.

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.