What Belongs To God?
29th Sunday In Ordinary Time 2017

Reflection By: Deacon Paul V. Hursh

During my men's group last Friday one of the men in the circle expressed his frustration over the constant confrontation and name-calling between the President, the Congress, and the news media. He shared that he had voted for the President, but he was more than dissatisfied with how things had played out over the past nine months. He seemed to be having second thoughts, if not about his choice, then about the effectiveness of our political system as a whole. Our Gospel today finds Jesus also locked in confrontation with his enemies who are doing their utmost to trip him up so that they could bring a charge against him.

Unlike the current situation in our nation, which remains unresolved, Jesus is able to fend off this most recent attack and silence his adversaries. He does this by moving beyond the partisan politics of his day that included the Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees. These three groups were natural enemies, but they often joined forces in opposing Jesus for their short-term goal of a temporal Jewish kingdom in their own time. When they confronted Jesus with the question regarding the census tax they marveled at him when he answered, "...Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." (Mark 13:17) What Jesus has done is to challenge his adversaries to move beyond mere civic obligation and the desire for temporal power, to God's Kingdom and our ultimate destiny.

The Kingdom of God doesn't come by the sword but by the Spirit of God. Only God can change the human heart (Proverbs 21:1), and God is not restricted by human activities. The challenge for us as well as to move beyond our own agenda and need for power and to commit to working for the coming Kingdom of God. How can we do this in the current climate that is poisoned by
political strife on all sides? A good first step would be to stop name-calling and start listening to others. Perhaps if I can pause long enough to listen to the concerns of others, I can respond to the needs of those in our society that are most needy. For the past several weeks we have offered prayers at Mass for our religious and political leaders to lead us with noble purpose and selfless hearts. Let us too, seek a higher purpose and selfless motives when we desire to bring about positive change in our world. I don't believe for a moment that this will begin at the seat of power unless we first act to live according to God's plan within our own lives.

If we have learned anything from the Herodian's, perhaps it is that we cannot take the kingdom by force of words or violence. We cannot try to establish a worldly kingdom when all the kingdoms of this world will fall under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It's futile trying to make this world a kingdom of men when the Kingdom of God is coming (and is already present within us) and will subjugate all other kingdoms of this world. There is no chance the Herodian's, Republicans, or Democrats, or any other sector group can do what God has already planned to do and that is, to rule the nations and the kingdoms of this world by the standard of love. Someday the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our God through the action of the Body of Christ, and it will be so for all time. ...but in the meantime, how are we to live lives of peace and tranquility in the midst of a twisted and depraved world?

We should strive to live in the peace Jesus sent upon his disciples at the last supper, when he said, "Peace - I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. " (John 14:27) To access this peace is to BE the peace we seek in this world. This can begin right now by not entering into conflict and engaging in name-calling. Rather, listen and consider what others are saying, even if you consider them the enemy. Don't expect it to change the world right away, but you will experience the peace within yourself now. "Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid." Give to God what is God's – your lives in trust and service to building the Kingdom of love and justice.