

Sacred Heart Novena - 31 May to 8 June 2018

HE LOVED WITH A HUMAN HEART

Day 6: Tuesday, 5 June – 9th Week in Ordinary Time – “We Belong to God”

Reading: 2 Pet 3: 12-15, 17-18; Responsorial Psalm: Ps 90; Gospel: Mark 12: 13-17

We are nearer and nearer to the Feast of the Sacred Heart. In the Gospel readings, the “conflict” between Jesus and the authorities of his day seem to be getting deeper and deeper. We continue from yesterday’s reading. Today we read that the chief priests, scribes and elders send some Pharisees and some Herodians with the specific purpose of trapping Jesus with his words. Jesus sees through their question and knows that they are testing him. *We, members of the Jewish people, should we pay taxes to the Roman emperor, the colonial power, or not?* We all know Jesus’s famous answer to this question – **“Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God!”** What a wise answer! He successfully escaped the trap! Like his listeners 2000 years ago, “we are utterly amazed at him!” Today, 2000 years after, we are still asking what he meant by that!

“Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.” What did Jesus mean then and what does he mean for us now? There are many answers available to us so I decided to go to the very top and see what Pope Francis says.

Pope Francis calls this statement “*one of the most famous phrases in the entire Gospel*” (homily for the Beatification of Pope Paul VI). In his address at the Angelus in Piazza San Pietro on 22 October last year, Pope Francis said that “*Jesus answers calmly and takes advantage of the malicious question to give an important teaching, rising above the controversy and the opposing sides.*” Remember that they were trying to trap Jesus, it was a malicious question “*Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor or not?*” Who were the opposing sides? The very ones who were trying to trap him, the Pharisees who are of the position that Jews should not pay taxes to the Roman emperor and the Herodians who believe they should. Pope Francis tells us “*On one hand, intimating to restore to the Emperor what belonged to him, Jesus said that to pay the tax was not an act of idolatry, but an act owed to the earthly authority; on the other hand recalling God’s primacy, Jesus asks that God be given what is due to God as Lord of our life and of history.*” Pope Francis further says “*The reference to Caesar’s image, engraved in the coin, says that it’s right to feel oneself fully — with rights and duties — citizens of the State, but, symbolically, Jesus makes one think of the other image that is imprinted in every human being: the image of God. God is the Lord of all and we, who have been created “in God’s image,” belong first of all to God. From the questions posed to him by the Pharisees, Jesus draws a more radical and vital question for each one of us, a question that we can ask ourselves: to whom do I belong? To the family, to the city, to friends, to the school, to work, to politics, to the State.*”... Let us pause at this point and ask ourselves, to whom do I belong? - Do I belong to somebody or some institution or organization? Do I belong to my family or to any other family? Do I belong to this parish? Do I belong to this country? Do I belong ... and to whom?

Pope Francis says “*Yes, certainly, (you belong to a family, to the city, to friends, to the school, to work, to politics, to the state) but first of all, Jesus reminds us, we belong to God. This is our fundamental belonging. It is He who has given us all that we are and that we have. And, therefore, day after day we can and must live our life in the acknowledgement of this, our fundamental belonging, and in our heart the acknowledgement of our Father, who*

created each one of us individually, unrepeatable, but always in keeping with the image of His beloved Son Jesus. It's a stupendous mystery."

We belong to God! This is what we are hearing Jesus tell us today, on this 6th day of our Novena to His Sacred Heart. We, each of us individually, and we, together, belong to God. And this God we belong to, as we have said repeatedly since day 1 of this novena, is a God who loved us into being and who continues to love us, day by day, moment by moment. And because we belong to Him together, God also calls us to welcome each other in love because in God, we also belong to each other. I guess that deep belief is what gives me the confidence to stand before you sharing my thoughts with you, everyday, for 9 days. The same conviction is probably what makes you welcome me so lovingly. It does not matter that I am not from your parish, that I am not even from your country or that I look and sound very different from you – what divides us, what is different about us, is not as deep as what unites us. We belong together to God and in God we belong to each other.

Let us go back to Pope Francis. In his homily during the beatification of Pope Paul VI, also commenting on the same Gospel episode, he said *"Certainly Jesus puts the stress on the second part of the phrase: "and give to God what is God's". This calls for acknowledging and professing – in the face of any sort of power – that God alone is the Lord of humankind, that there is no other. This is the perennial newness to be discovered each day, and it requires mastering the fear which we often feel at God's surprises.* What is the Pope saying here? How do I understand his words? He says when we are asked to "Give to God what is God's," what this might concretely entail today is usually different from what it might entail tomorrow. The Pope says it is a "perennial newness to be discovered each day." And because our God is a God of surprises, we never really know what each day would bring. Therefore, to be able to give God what is God's every single day, "requires us to master the fear which we often feel at God's surprises" and be ready to ask what is it Lord that you are calling me to give to you today. There is no reason for fear, our God who surprises us every day is a God who loves us. How do I give to God today what belongs to God?

After the Mass, this God we belong to invites us to give back to Him our whole selves in the sacrament of reconciliation – our whole selves...joys and sorrows, strengths and weaknesses, goodness and sinfulness...

Give to God what belongs to God! Near the end of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola, he gives us a prayer of giving to God what belongs to God, a bold prayer that dares us to ponder and act on our identity, our fundamental belonging. Let this be our prayer today as we prepare to receive the Lord in this Eucharist and encounter His Love and Forgiveness in the sacrament of reconciliation:

*Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding, and my entire will,
all I have and call my own.
You have given all to me. To you Lord I return it.
Everything is yours; do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace, that is enough for me.
Amen.*