

29th Sunday per Annum - A
Isaiah 45:1, 4-6;
I Thessalonians 1:1-5b;
Matthew 22:15-21
Little Flower - 10/18/20

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today is Mission Sunday. The theme of this year's World Mission Day is "Here am I, send me (Is 6:8)" in response to the Lord's question "Whom shall I send?" If today were not a Sunday, we would be celebrating the Feast of St. Luke the Evangelist today. He was the author of the third Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. The Acts of the Apostles tells the story of the beginnings of the Church. In Acts, we read the stories of the apostles, especially Peter and Paul, proclaiming the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ, both to Christians and non-Christians, both Jews and Gentiles. Today we are asked to support the missionary efforts of the Church both in our country and throughout the world.

Individually all of us are called to live the Great Commission from Matthew's Gospel: "*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations...*" Today we all need to ask ourselves how we live the Great Commission in our own personal lives. In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul reminded them that the Gospel did not come to them in word alone but in power and in the Holy Spirit and with conviction. In other words, in whatever ways we proclaim the Gospel through our lives, the impact we have on others does not depend on us alone. Today, through us, the Gospel continues to come in power and in the Holy Spirit and with conviction. We are called to live our lives in faith, to act out of love, and always to be hopeful.

In today's reading from Isaiah, God said to King Cyrus, "*I have called you by your name, giving you a title, though you knew me not.*" In other words, God specifically chose King Cyrus, a non-Jew, to restore the people of Israel and to rebuild the temple. We believe that God calls each of us by name. To each of us, God gives a unique vocation. God has a plan for each of us. Each of us has a unique part to play in God's plan of salvation. Our challenge as we strive to live the Great Commission is to discern and respond to God's plan for us.

The words in today's Gospel are particularly relevant today: "*Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.*" Other translations of this verse substitute *render* for *repay*. Rendering to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and rendering to God what belongs to God is a balancing act. For example, for the last several years, there have been multiple challenges to religious freedom. These challenges have increased during the pandemic as civil authorities have limited religious services or even forbidden them. In these cases, the challenge has been to balance religious freedom to worship as we choose with the government's valid interest in protecting the health of the people by limiting the spread of the coronavirus.

My brothers and sisters, tragically, our nation is bitterly divided as the 2020 election approaches. Political divisions are in some cases dividing families, friends, and even churches. Adding to the divisions are the contentious Senate confirmation hearings for Supreme Court nominee Amy Coney Barrett. In previous election years, I have tried to raise some issues about which we need to be concerned as we prepare to cast our ballots. I am not going to do that this year because anything I would say would be misconstrued as favoring one candidate or party. However, as part of giving to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's, I want to encourage everyone who is registered to vote. Before you vote, please study the candidates' positions on various issues, pray over them, and finally vote for the candidates whose beliefs and positions you believe will most advance the common good, i.e., the candidates whose positions you believe will best embody authentic human Christian values.