

## **Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time: Matthew 22:34-40**

In a week or so, voters throughout the United States will go to the polls, (**November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020**) participating once again in the democratic process. This, of course, is a presidential election year, and the stakes are high. As Election Day approaches, it is important for us as Christians in the Catholic tradition to take some time and reflect on what our faith asks of us as we prepare to vote. The Commandment of Love of God and neighbor should guide us. The most important aspect to look at as a Christian is to know that every person who walks this Earth possesses the image of God. It's your Christian obligation to vote not just for you but for one another. Our society bombards us almost daily with the message that we should care only about ourselves. "You owe it to yourself," we hear in advertisements for vacation trips. "You deserve the best," we hear from people selling expensive products. Jesus' teachings run exactly counter to this prevalent attitude. The mark of a Christian is the love we show for one another. The popular hymn says it best, "They'll know we are Christians by our love." First and foremost, it is important that we all vote, that we participate in the process. The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us, "It is necessary that all participate, each according to his position and role, in promoting the common good. This obligation is inherent in the dignity of the human person, as far as possible citizens should take an active part in public life" (**nos. 1913—15**). We have a responsibility, as American citizens, to go to the polls, and as Christians, to go with formed consciences—consciences formed not only by pundits and campaign speeches and attack ads, but by prayer and the wisdom found in Scripture.

In the first reading of this Sunday, we are reminded of the Lord's call to not only care for the widow, the stranger, and the orphan, but also hear their cries and work to ensure they are not oppressed. Further, we are asked to ensure that our economic life favors those on the margins, prioritizing the material needs of the poorest among us. In our gospel text from Matthew, Jesus teaches that the greatest commandment is to love God, and the second commandment is like it—to love your neighbor as yourself. **Note that Jesus says the commandment to love your neighbor is like loving God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.** In other words, in loving your neighbor as yourself, you are loving God. And how do we express that love? In many ways, one fulfilling your civic duties. To one brother's keeper is one. We are called to practice Christ's commandment to 'love one another.' We are also called to promote the wellbeing of all, to share our blessings with those most in need, to defend marriage, and to protect the lives and dignity of all, especially the weak, the vulnerable, the voiceless.

This is, of course, a tall order in our current political environment. Candidates make many promises, and few, if any, will go to the lengths necessary to ensure the dignity of all human beings. That is why it remains important for all of us to remain engaged in the process beyond Election Day, to hold our elected leaders accountable not only to us as individuals, but to the common good. What happens in Kentucky, or Nevada, or Arizona...should be your concern as if it happens in your back yard in Lansing, Il or Munster or Lynwood, or Chicago heights. Our country is deeply divided along many lines. Often in those partisan and ideological divisions, common ground seems impossible. And yet, that is what we as a church, as a community of faith, are called upon to create. In this sanctuary today are people from different perspectives—Democrats, Republicans, Independents, and more. We know that labels such as liberal, conservative, progressive, and traditional fail to capture the totality of any one person. **What does capture who we are is the fact that we all belong here, part of the beloved community, each made in likeness of our Creator.** The greatest gift we can give to our world today is to model what it is like to be a community where all are welcome, where all life is sacred, the young life, the unborn life, the elderly and where we work together to bring about the common good by seeking common ground with all races that make up this great nation.

In an age when the word 'love' is greatly abused, it is important to remember that the primary component of **biblical love is not affection but commitment.** Warm feelings of gratitude may fill our consciousness as we consider all that God has done for us, but it is not warm feelings that Deut. 6:5 demands of us but rather stubborn, unwavering commitment. Similarly, to love our neighbor, including our enemies, does not mean that we must feel affection for them. To love the neighbor is to imitate God by taking their needs seriously. Remember the statement we pose at each election year: **"Bad officials, are elected by the good people who do not vote"**. Let's all go to vote.