

Blessing of New Altar - St. Joseph, Fullerton

Introduction

I am delighted to return to St. Joseph Parish to offer this anticipated Sunday Mass and to bless the beautiful new altar on which the banquet of Christ's sacrifice will be offered to God the Father.

On this beautiful autumn afternoon, I want to join with you in expressing our deepest gratitude to your pastor, Msgr. Kevin Schenning, for his leadership and service of this wonderful parish! At the same time, I want to express my thanks to Father Jeff Hubbard for his presence and service to your parish family as well as to Fr. Tom Donaghy for his long and loving priestly service.

Allow me now to offer a reflection based on the Gospel we have just heard, a Gospel which helps us understand the rich and beautiful rite for dedicating a new altar which we are about to celebrate.

'Escaping Like a Bird from the Fowler's Snare'

In today's Gospel Jesus' enemies tried to trap him by asking if it were lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar, ruler of the Roman Empire and occupier of the land of God's chosen people. It was indeed a trick question. If, on the one hand, Jesus answered, "yes, it is lawful to pay the census tax", his enemies could condemn him for complicity with Caesar's oppressive empire. In that case, Jesus would deny God's special relationship with the Chosen People. If, on the other hand, Jesus answered that it was *not* lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, then his enemies would have accused him of lawlessness, of being a brigand, a revolutionary, a disturber of the public order.

Jesus did not fall for the trap. 'Innocent as a dove and wise as a serpent,' Jesus answered his enemies with words that still mystify and inspire us: "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's & to God the things that are God's." Here Jesus makes it clear that everything comes from God and that all earthly power is limited and subordinate to God's power. Human life, human rights, human dignity and

freedom are not given us by the generosity of the government but by the hand of God.

We Owe Everything to God

As citizens and believers we love our country and obey its laws. We pray for our leaders, pay taxes, and defend our freedoms. We seek to foster the dignity of each person while seeking the common good of all. And we believe this to be holy and pleasing in the sight of God. Yet even as we fulfill our obligations to our country and to our society we know deep down that we owe everything to God. Every good gift has come from God and was given us for his glory.

And so the question posed in Psalm 116 rings in our ears: “How shall I make a return to the Lord for the great good he has done for me?” And the psalmist answers: “I will raise the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord.” This brings us to the central reason why we have built this altar and now dedicate it. Of ourselves, we are powerless to render to God what is his. There is nothing we can offer the Lord that he already does not have - except for one thing: and that’s the free gift of our love. But we are hampered from making that offering to God because of our sins, because of all those ways in which we withhold from God our love.

Unable on our own to worship God “in spirit and truth”, God sent His Son into the world to become one of us, to take upon himself our sins, and to offer the one sacrifice that brings us salvation. When our lives are joined to Christ in the Eucharist and when we share his sacrificial love, which is stronger than sin and death, *then* we are enabled to offer God a living sacrifice of praise. In the process, our souls are nourished, our spirits strengthened, so that we can live as the Lord’s disciples. In giving ourselves to God and to others in and through our Eucharistic Lord, we find true peace and true joy.

“It Is Right and Just”

This is why we build churches, construct altars, and adorn them: to offer God the one sacrifice that gives him glory & brings us salvation and joy! This is why it was such an important project to ensure that a truly beautiful altar would be the true focal point of this church. When we enter and look upon this altar, we should be immediately reminded of all that Jesus said and did to bring about our salvation. And

we should be glad, thankful that Jesus enables us in his mercy love to render unto God the things that are God's, viz., our love, our praise, our thanks!

Let us ask the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the intercession of St. Joseph so that we might entrust ourselves & each other and our whole life to Christ our God!"