

Homily; 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

A young lady was soaking up the sun's rays on a Florida beach when a little boy in his swimming trunks, carrying a towel, came up to her and asked her, "Do you believe in God?" She was surprised by the question but she replied, "Why, yes, I do." Then he asked her: "Do you go to church every Sunday?" Again, her answer was "Yes!" He then asked: "Do you read your Bible and pray everyday?" Again she said, "Yes!" By now her curiosity was very much aroused. The little lad sighed with relief and said, "Will you hold my quarter while I go in swimming?"

The little boy was straightforward and honest in his questions because he wanted to entrust to the lady something valuable. The Pharisees are not being honest. They have no intent in entrusting Jesus with anything. They are not looking for the answer to a question. They are looking for a way to get rid of Jesus.

So what does the Jesus, do? He looks at these men and recognizes the insincerity and danger of the question and turns it back on them.

The most interesting part of Jesus' clever avoiding of the trap was that it stands for all time as another one of those issues that will always come up in the lives of us humans who live in a world of relationships that needs government. Taxes and government are part and parcel of human life. So I turn my question on you. What do you owe Caesar? What do you owe God?" Isn't that a question that could be directed to us also? As Catholics we know that both God and Caesar have claims on us and fortunately they usually are not mutually exclusive. If we found our government leading us away from

the teaching of God, we would be conscience bound to follow God. From the day that God set up the garden and put us in it, he has always been consistent. He has always let us decide. And our decisions have always made us who we are.

And in that plan, we have the freedom to choose. And it's a complicated choice at all times. One cannot live as one chooses in the world of men and then on Sunday submit to a world of the holy. It means rendering to Caesar what he has a right to take but constantly reminding ourselves that Caesar's right can never trample on the right of the Father.

One Sunday morning after saying Mass some years ago, I was approached by a couple with their baby cuddled by the wife. "Father, we're from this parish," they greeted.

"We're lay missionaries to New Guinea and we're on vacation." We got to talking about their work. I found it inspiring that a lay couple could make the sacrifice of leaving a comfortable home and country to devote some years in the "mission."

This weekend we celebrate **WORLD MISSION SUNDAY**. And the the truth of the matter is: Every Christian, by virtue of baptism, **IS** a missionary.

Obviously, not all can do what the couple missionary did. But for most of us, all that we can do is to be missionaries at home, whether you are a teacher, nurse, executive, lawyer or ordinary housewife. What counts is not geography, but the attitude.

Remember St. Therese of the Child Jesus? She never stepped out of the four walls of her Carmelite cloister but was chosen as the universal patroness of Catholic missions.

She merited the title because of her burning obsession to save souls by offering every little act, every bodily pain for the conversion of immortal souls.

How can we be missionaries at home? Like St. Therese, we can offer prayers and sacrifices for the missions.

Then we can give a part of ourselves by means of financial contribution. Ordinarily money is what we receive when we are employed; it thus represents a part of ourselves.

Money is a necessity for the success of evangelization. Missionaries, lay workers, catechists must be housed, fed, clothed, transported; churches, schools, convents, clinics, social centers have to be built in missions or underdeveloped places.

Let's face it: One of the most difficult things to do is to part off with one's money. This reminds me about a parish priest who was making an impassioned appeal to the parish council for the annual mission collection.

Great was everybody's surprise when the wealthiest, but miserly member of the council rose and offered to start the collection rolling with a contribution of \$500.

As he stood up to hand in the amount, a mild earthquake took place and some plaster from the ceiling fell and hit him on the head.

A bit shaken, he withdrew the amount and said, "I guess I'd better make that \$5,000." A small voice from the back of the hall was heard, "Hit him again, Lord." (It's not known if he added some more).

How about you? Are you doing something for the missions?