

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 22, 2017
By Deacon Nick Thompson

We often hear things that just beg to be repeated, pearls of wisdom. Some from sources we expect, others just come out of nowhere, like bricks. For instance, my father told me, “Every coin has heads and tails but in all things human the ‘head end’ should win over the ‘tail end’ every time.” Wise words, unfortunately, I’ve discovered especially with humans, we still only have a fifty-fifty chance of the head taking charge. My grandmother, who introduced me to the likes of G. K. Chesterton and C. S. Lewis would tell me, “If your mind is too open, your brain will fall out.” This statement I have discovered has always been true. This week an unexpected source of wisdom appeared out of nowhere: The Trump Administration is apparently making it clear exactly how pro-life they are; the Department of Health and Human Services’ strategic plan document for 2018 to 2022 says clearly, “HHS accomplishes its mission through programs and initiatives that cover a wide spectrum of activities, serving Americans at every stage of life, beginning at conception.” What an insight! A government agency has finally discovered when life begins! Perhaps the war on abortion has taken a turn. Give the Lord glory and honor!

In the gospel reading the last few weeks Jesus is at war. He is entangled in a life or death struggle a series of public debates in which he is willingly placing his life on the line for us. Up to now Jesus has been on the offensive. He has publicly defeated the enemy three times over the last four weeks. The enemy have been those characterized as the disobedient son, who says, “yes” but then does not do what the Father asks. They have been the wicked caretakers of the vineyard who murder the king’s messengers and son. And finally, they have been both the unworthy wedding guests who refuse the invitation and the wedding guest with an attitude who refuses to wear the provided wedding garment. Jesus calls them hypocrites, his’ attacks are so publicly humiliating to his many enemies that together they begin to plot how they might trap Jesus in speech.

Pharisee and Herodian, strange bedfellows who normally despised one another, separated both by religious practice of faith and political compliance with Rome, but now allies. Its no surprise that their trap for Jesus would include their' own differences. Should we pay the tax to Rome? A "no" is sedition against Rome and the Herodian have Jesus right where they want him. A "yes" and since the tax is a tribute to Caesar an earthly King, the Pharisees catch Jesus in blasphemy a denial of God's sole right to kingship of heaven and earth. Jesus' simple answer, "Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God." Both groups of his enemies lose another battle against the truth of God incarnate. "For great is the Lord and highly to be praised, awesome is he."

You see! Jesus keeps an open mind, but a mind opened to rightful practice of man's law when it is not in conflict with fulfillment of God's law. His brain is never in danger of falling out. Jesus never lays down limited rules and regulations; that is why his teaching is timeless. Rather, he lays down eternal principles. He lets us know that each of us has a dual citizenship but a single responsibility. We are citizens of the country in which we live. And to it we owe many things. We owe it for our safety against those who are lawless. We owe it for our public services, our standard of living, our education, medical services, jobs, unemployment benefits, leadership (Though some would debate the quality of our moral leadership). But, either way, we are placed under a debt of obligation of allegiance to our country for the goods and services it provides God's people. Because we are Christian, and a people of honor, we are obliged to be responsible citizens. Failure in good citizenship is also failure in Christian duty and ultimately failure to the common good, the body of Christ. In fact, when Christians refuse to take their part in administration and leave it to self serving, partisan and unchristian people the results can be catastrophic.

We Christians are also citizens of the Kingdom of heaven. There are matters of faith and of moral principle in which the responsibility of the Christian is to God. It may well be that these two citizenships will never clash. They really don't need to. But, when the Christian is convinced that it is

God's will that something should be done, it must be done. Or, if we are convinced that something is against the will of God, we must resist it and take no part in it. Exactly where the boundaries between the two lie Jesus doesn't say. That's for our informed consciences to test. But a real Christian, and this is the permanent truth which Jesus here lays down, is at one and the same time a good citizen of their country and a good citizen of the Kingdom of God. We should fail neither in our duty to God nor to man and these duties do not conflict if God's law is the focus. After all we owe God everything because everything belongs to God even government. "The Lord is King, he governs the people with equity."

Our nation's soul is in peril, there is among us an enemy of our Christian faith and morality. It is a concept an idea that up until now our government in error has chosen to uphold. Who decides on the sanctity of life and who decides when life begins? Is it us or is it God? We are at war and the institution at stake is the basic building block of our faith, the family. Abortion and the structure of sin that supports it, contraception, divorce, pre-marital sex, cohabitation, euthanasia, death penalty and sexual immorality are attacking the future well being of our children's families and our own. These ideas and the people who support them are supporting attitudes concerning "life" which are opposed to God's law. They are supporting the enemy. The battle is being fought by a few and being paid lip service to by many but the war has been going on since the fall of man and our Christian majority has grown complacently silent. The parking lot in front of the abortion clinic on Kuykendahl feels the same protesting feet each week as innocents are ripped from their mother's wombs just a short distance away. The life chain grows embarrassingly smaller each year, the outcry from our pulpits further between. Parents, often say nothing openly to their children about the lifestyles and the ideas that support abortion. Is it fear of alienating them even as their lifestyle leads them down the path to hell? It is as if we hope that with silence the battle will end or simply go away. But the battle will not die until the laws and ideas that support our enemies are destroyed.

As future saints, as believers we can have no compassion for sin, no complacency, no acceptance, no open-mindedness. False ideas concerning life issues are in fact real enemies there is a real need for thinking negatively against them. More importantly there is a real need for negative acting, for what medievalists called *agere contra*, acting contrarily, that is, not to “go with the majority,” not to “go with the flow.” If we live in a world whose flow leads to hell, it is absolutely, imperative that we do not go with the flow but against it. These ideas are real poison, we are fools to treat them like normal food. If there is cancer in the soul, we are fools to allow it to grow like normal tissue. If there are barbarians at the gates of our moral values, we are fools to open our minds and pretend they are citizens. Remember: “If your mind is too open, your brain will fall out.” Ideas are not people. We should not discriminate against people. But there are ideas that deserve the utmost discrimination. As G. K. Chesterton says, “Having an open mind is like having an open mouth, it is not an end but a means to an end. The end is closing the mouth and the mind on something solid.” It’s time to for action. The battle is upon us. Let us find ourselves among those of whom Paul speaks when he says, “We give thanks to God unceasingly, calling to mind your work of faith and labor of love and endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ, before God and father, knowing, brothers and sisters loved by God, how you were chosen. For our Gospel did not come to you in word alone, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with much conviction.” Let us not give up the fight for life from conception to death. Let us give thanks to God that like Cyrus in the Old Testament, he can even use The Department of Health and Human Services to awaken a nation to the truth. Perhaps our nation will now begin to “Sing to the Lord a new song.”