

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
22nd October 2023 - 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings (Year A): 1st: Isaiah 45:1,4-6. 2nd: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5. **Gospel:** Matthew 22:15-21.

T.S. Eliot once said, 'Most of the trouble in the world is caused by people wanting to be important.'

Archbishop Desmond Tutu was widely known for his anti-apartheid work in South Africa. Mahatma Gandhi's campaigns for peace and justice inspired people throughout the world. Both rejected the path of violent resistance in favour of peaceful change. However, neither was passive or quiet.

Tutu famously said "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.

Both also had incredible hope and belief that situations could change, not through violence, but through love. "Good is always stronger than evil," said Tutu, "love is stronger than hate, light is stronger than darkness, life is stronger than death. Victory is ours, through him who loves us."

Gandhi reflected "When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love has always won. There have been tyrants and murderers and for a time they seem invincible, but in the end, they always fall – think of it, always."

Both faced criticism and even hatred but continued to believe in the strength of love above all.

Jesus too had to deal with different forms of authority and the legal systems of his day.

The Pharisees hope to trap Jesus. They want him to make an anti-Roman statement to get him into trouble with the authorities. But as ever, he sees through their trick, and teaches us a truth about the way we should live.

His emphasis is always on the imperative love of God, and of where that love leads us, what actions that love causes us to take. He reminds them and us that we can and should pay dues to Caesar, as long as (and this is most important) that this is not contrary to what God asks. Our duty to God overrides all other duties.

This question of authority can be one of the trickiest for us to work out. We are called to be responsible citizens, respect authority and the law, pay our taxes in the interests of the common good and play our part in civil society.

But we are also called as Christians to work for peace and bring about justice. In order to bring about justice, we cannot be neutral in the face of injustice -we cannot be on the side of the elephant against the mouse, the oppressor against the oppressed.

Today's readings can help us understand how to face these tricky decisions. There is only one God. There is no other. Money cannot take the place of God, nor can status, nor even those who rule over us on earth.

Our eyes and our hearts as Christians are fixed on God and we follow Christ, who is the way and the truth. Like Gandhi and Tutu we are to believe in love above all. If change is needed we can take action, but peacefully and respectfully.

It is by acting in love and in hope based in our faith that more just situations can be brought about. It is not through violence, war or hatred that we bring about peace.

Jesus shows us that we can live in the world and act as responsible citizens, but that our hearts are always to be set on God.

The mission we have to give to the world.