

Homily – 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time – October 16th, 2011

by Deacon Brian Cordeiro

As parents, we delight in our children. Which of us has not felt a boost of genuine pride when we heard someone say that our child was a spitting image of us or that he/she took after the father or mother?

There are many times in our lives that we may have this great joy. Sometimes it may happen even before the birth of our child. I remember very clearly the first time I saw the image of each of my children, the ultra sound of the foetus. Even as I gazed at the picture of the foetus on the screen, there was an outpouring of joy and pride that burst within me.

In fact, when Effie and I looked at the foetus of our second son Pierre Bosco, we marvelled how very similar he looked like our eldest son André Joseph's pre-natal image. Surprising? Not at all. We reflect the parentage from which we come.

In fact with modern technology and the use of DNE, we know that each of us has a distinct genetic code and in case of doubt, such genetic codes can be used to determine who the person in question is, for instance when identifying a person or solving a crime.

It is indeed the same with us and our heavenly Father. We are meant to be reflections of God our Father. We are told in the first reading that Cyrus was specially chosen by God and given power to act in God's name. Cyrus the Great Persian king was in fact chosen by God to deliver the Jews.

He was the monarch who captured Babylon in 539BC and under whom the captivity of the Jews ended, for in the first year of his reign he was prompted by God to make a decree that the temple in Jerusalem should be rebuilt and that Jews might return to their land. Moreover, he showed his interest in the project by sending back with them the sacred vessels which had been taken from the temple and a considerable sum of money with which to buy building materials.

Cyrus was called by name and so is each one of us. God says to each of us «I have called you by name and you are mine». What an awesome privilege to be called by God by name. What an awesome privilege but also an awesome responsibility.

Paul reminds the Thessalonians how they too have been chosen. And he gives us a clue as to how we need to respond to our call. He commends the Thessalonians because they have been worthy of their call. They live their lives in faith, love and hope.

Faith in Jesus Christ that wins us our salvation, love as manifested in our relationships and our actions towards one another and hope that Jesus Christ will return and we will all be joined with Him in the presence of His Father.

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The Gospel gives us a clear idea as to how we need to act as children of God. Cyrus was called by God, so were the Thessalonians and so are we. In baptism, we are called by name. As Christians, we also bear the name of the one we follow as disciples, Jesus Christ.

So as Christians, how should we behave? We are to be in the world but not of this world. We are to be wise and shrewd at times. In the Gospel, the Pharisees are trying to entrap Jesus. They formulate a question that no matter which way Jesus answers, he would be in trouble. If He said that it not lawful to pay the census tax, He would be guilty of breaking the law and if He said that it was lawful to pay the tax, He would incur the anger of the Jews, who felt that this was an unjust tax. Jesus very wisely refrains from directly answering the question.

Rather He refers them back to the image on the coin. Since the image on the coin is Caesar's, pay Caesar what is due to him; but also pay to God what is due to God.

As Christians, we live in a world that is governed by laws made by human institutions and as good Christians, we must observe these laws unless they are in conflict with God's laws. Even if we do not like taxes, we must pay them as honest citizens and good Christians.

But we also have the image of God in our souls, and image that was implanted at baptism. So we are called to the higher order of faith, hope and love that Paul talks about, something that distinguishes as Christians. As the hymn goes, «they will know we are Christians by our love, by our love, yes, they will know we are Christians by our love.

Let us ask for God's spirit to take over our lives and give us the wisdom so that while being good citizens of a natural order, we may be also clearly seen as disciples of a heavenly order, Christian in the way we live our lives, people of hope in a world that is to come.