

XVIII TRINITY 2017

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

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ST. MATTHEW 22.34

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It's about a week before the first Palm Sunday. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem...where he will ride into the city on a donkey...fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy written 600 years earlier.

Before he gets to Jerusalem Jesus has to deal with questions from the Sadducees and Pharisees. Each group has an agenda...and from now until the first Good Friday...things are going to start heating up.

Today's Gospel begins by telling us Jesus "silenced" the Sadducees...and now it was the Pharisees turn to take a crack at him. The Pharisees and Sadducees were the chief Jewish religious and political parties of the day. They disagreed about many things, including what happens to a person after death. The Sadducees don't believe in life after death...the Pharisees do.

The Sadducees...who don't believe in heaven...try to trick Jesus with a question about marriage in heaven...quoting a passage from Deuteronomy instructing a man's widow to marry his brothers until she produced an heir. They ask Jesus to explain whose wife she will be in heaven.

Jesus replied, "You guys don't know what you are talking about. Don't you know Habbakkuk wrote in heaven everyone will be like angels and there will be no need for marriage". Jesus also tells them they don't know their own scriptures, because if they did, they would know the God they claim to believe in, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is the God of the living, not the dead.

The Pharisees were gleeful at how Jesus had embarrassed the Sadducees so completely they couldn't ask him any more questions and were "silenced". The Pharisees now seized on what they thought was the perfect opportunity to trap Jesus with a trick question of their own..."Tell us, Jesus, what is the greatest commandment"? Jesus correctly answers, "Love God with our whole being...love others like we want to be loved." That's not the answer the Pharisees wanted to hear.

They were hoping Jesus would say one commandment was more important than another. Since all commandments carry equal weight...and are covered by the Great Commandment to love God first and love others in the way we want to be loved...any other answer would have given them what they needed to get Jesus condemned as a heretic. Jesus was not about to get trapped; he beat them at their own game.

Jesus then turns the tables and asks the Pharisees what they think about the Messiah. They answer he will be a descendant of the great King David. "OK, let's see just how smart you guys really are", says Jesus. He quotes Psalm 110 and asks them, "Tell me why David calls his descendant 'Lord'?" .

"Lord" is a title of respect and would have been used by a younger person in addressing his elders and when talking about his ancestors. A father or uncle would never have called his own son or nephew "Lord". Why then does David call his descendant "Lord"? Good question!

Psalm 110 is heard at ordinations..."The Lord said to my Lord; sit here at my right side until I put your enemies under your feet." Parishioners call their priest "Father"...he is supposed to act like a father and care for the people...to keep them focused on the Lord. In the Psalm, "The Lord" is God; "my Lord" is Jesus...the Messiah...our Savior. God the Father tells Jesus, his Son, to take the place of honor and sit down at his right side.

Now it was the Pharisees' turn to be silenced...but they didn't stay silent for very long. Saint John tells us Jesus said to the Pharisees, "Before Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were, I AM!" Jesus has just called himself by the name reserved for God alone...God! Jesus just gave the Pharisees everything they needed to get him executed...and he knew it.

Jesus asks us the same question he asked the Pharisees..."What do you think of me...who do you think I am?" We believe his claim to being God's Son is legitimate...to love him is to claim him as our Lord and Savior...and to know our God is the God of the living...not of the dead...just as Jesus said!

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