

XVIII Trinity 2023  
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish  
Father Craig Looney  
*St. Matthew 22.34-46*



Politics...from the Greek word *politika*...can best be translated as “affairs of the city”. Judaism historically made no distinction between religious and secular politics...God was in charge of both. There was no such thing as separation of church and state.

The two major religious parties of Jesus’ time were groups we hear a lot about in the Gospel readings...Pharisees and Sadducees. The two groups differed on interpretation and application of the Law. The major religious difference between the two parties...Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead...Sadducees did not.

The action in today’s Gospel takes place during the first Holy Week. It’s a pivotal moment in the life of Jesus. He knows his time on earth is short. The stakes are higher than ever...but he doesn’t hold back on saying and doing what he must to complete his mission of redemption of mankind.

The Gospel begins by telling us that Jesus had “silenced the Sadducees”. We get that information from the part of Matthew’s Gospel not included in today’s reading. The Sadducees had tried to trick Jesus with a question about marriage in heaven. They quote a passage from Deuteronomy that instructed a man’s widow to marry his brothers until she produced an heir. They then ask Jesus to explain whose wife she will be in heaven, which they don’t believe exists.

Jesus “silenced the Sadducees” by telling them they don’t know their own Scriptures or God’s power. Jesus quotes the prophet Habakkuk who wrote about 700 years earlier we will be like the angels in heaven. We will not become angels...we will be like angels who have no need for marriage.

Jesus then tells the Sadducees if they really understood their own Scriptures they would know what was written in Exodus...God told the people he the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob...he is the God of the living, not the dead. Our Sadducee friends could not say anything else.

Now it’s the Pharisees turn to try to trick Jesus with a question of their own, which they

hope he will answer in a way they could use against him. They ask him what is the greatest commandment. Jesus answered the greatest commandment is to love God above everything else and love our neighbors like we want to be loved. Since the Pharisees knew that was the right answer they couldn’t say anything against Jesus...at least not yet.

Earlier we talked about Jesus knowing his time on earth is short. His encounters with the religious leaders are about to become more and more heated. Jesus asks the Pharisees what they think about the Messiah. They answer that he will be a descendant of King David. “OK, then”, says Jesus. “Tell me why David called his descendant ‘Lord?’”

Psalm 110 begins “The Lord said to my Lord; sit here at my right side until I put your enemies under your feet.” In Psalm 110, “The Lord” refers to God; “my Lord” refers to the Messiah. The Lord God says to my Lord, the Messiah, take the place of honor and sit down at my right side. .

‘Lord’ is a title of respect and would have been used by a younger person in addressing his elders. A father would never have called his own son ‘Lord’. An uncle would never have called his nephew ‘Lord’. Why then does David call his descendant ‘Lord’?

The only way “The Lord” would say to “my Lord” to take the place of honor; the only way David could call his own descendant, Jesus the Messiah, his ‘Lord’, is if ‘The Lord’ and “my Lord’ were one and the same...God.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus increases the stakes in his discussions with the religious leaders when he says, “Before Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were, I AM!” Jesus has just declared himself to be God...and in doing so signed his own death warrant

Mark records in today’s Gospel the religious leaders could not answer Jesus’ question about the Messiah. They hated Jesus and would now do everything in their power to get him get him killed.

But in signing his own death warrant, Jesus has made it possible for us to have a place in heaven. We believe Jesus is God’s Son. And our God is the God of the living, not of the dead.

