The text for the sermon this morning is written in the twentieth verse of the third chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians: "For our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ."

Lask week, for All Saints' Day, we considered that great multitude gathered before the throne of God – the countless faithful whose names may have been forgotten on earth, but who are known and loved by Him. – And we also remembered that we belong to the same Body of Christ and share the same calling to holiness. – This morning, St. Paul brings that heavenly fellowship directly into our daily lives. – Our citizenship, he tells us, is in heaven. – And that raises a practical question: What difference should that citizenship make while we are still living?

Most of us spend much of our time attending to immediate responsibilities. – There are bills to pay, family members who need us, work to be done, and concerns about our health or our future. – There are also the things of our country and community, which can occupy a considerable part of our attention. – These things matter. They involve real people and real obligations. – But they can become so absorbing that we begin to live as though the whole meaning of our lives were contained within them. – We may continue to believe in heaven – while

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giving very little thought to what 'belonging to heaven' means today.

The Gospel then, places us in the middle of a question about earthly allegiance. – The Pharisees send their disciples, together with the Herodians, to ask Jesus whether it is lawful to pay tribute to Caesar. They approach Him with flattering words, but St. Matthew tells us that their purpose is to entangle Him in His speech.

The presence of the Herodians is significant. They were supporters of the family of Herod, probably attached particularly to Herod Antipas, who ruled Galilee under Roman authority. While the Pharisees were chiefly concerned with the interpretation and observance of the Law. Their interests were different, yet here they cooperate in an attempt to discredit Jesus. An answer against the tax could expose Him to the Roman authorities; an answer in its favor could turn those who resented Roman rule against Him. They want to force Him into a position from which they can accuse Him.

Our Lord asks them to produce the tribute money and identify the image and inscription upon it. When they answer that these belong to Caesar, He tells them to render to Caesar what

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belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God. – His answer acknowledges a real obligation toward earthly authority. Yet it also places that obligation within something greater: the claim of God upon human life. – Caesar has his due, but Caesar himself lives under the authority of God.

St. John Chrysostom makes this distinction when commenting on the passage. He explains that our Lord's command to fulfil our obligations to Caesar extends only to those things that do no injury to godliness. Earthly authority cannot make something contrary to God's will into a Christian duty. That gives us a principle which is both demanding and steadying. We should be conscientious in our public responsibilities, honest in our dealings, and concerned for the welfare of our neighbors. Through all of it, our consciences must remain answerable to Christ.

But we should be careful about making this Gospel only a question of what governments may require of us. There are other powers to which we willingly surrender considerable authority. – The desire for approval can determine what we are prepared to say. – The desire for comfort can determine whom we are willing to help. – Anxiety about possessions can determine how generously we give. – We may insist that no earthly ruler has a

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claim upon our souls, while allowing much smaller things to govern our hearts.

That is where the Epistle lesson becomes searching for us. St. Paul speaks with tears about people whose lives have become governed by appetite and earthly concerns. His grief matters. He sees the spiritual ruin toward which they are moving, and he mourns for them. – Their desires have become their masters. – They have become so occupied with the satisfaction of the present moment – that they are losing sight of the life to which Christ has called them. – We should hear that warning with humility, because the temptation is familiar to us all.

Against that way of living, Paul sets our citizenship in heaven. – Notice that he speaks of something we possess already. Through our incorporation into Christ, we have been brought into a fellowship whose life and authority come from Him. – Heaven therefore concerns our present conduct as well as our future hope. – We are learning, here and now, to live under the rule of the King to whom we belong.

That learning usually takes place in ordinary circumstances. – It happens when we tell the truth – although dishonesty would be convenient – – when we forgive someone whose offence we

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would rather continue discussing – – or when we give time to a person who cannot repay us. – It happens when we fulfil an unnoticed responsibility faithfully. – These choices have a place in our preparation for eternity. In them, the grace of God trains our desires and strengthens our obedience. – And we begin to recognize the difference between what merely attracts us and what is worthy of the life Christ has given us.

The Collect this morning reminds us where the strength for this comes from. We address God as "our refuge and strength." – We come before Him as people who need His help. – Our divided hearts require His healing; our uncertain wills require His direction. – Prayer brings our responsibilities, fears, and desires before the One who can put them into their proper order. – We ask Him to teach us how to use what we possess, how to bear what troubles us, and how to serve those whom He has placed beside us.

Then St. Paul directs our attention forward. From heaven, he says, we look for the Saviour. – Christian life has an expectation running through it. The Lord who redeemed us will come again – and Paul describes His coming in terms of the transformation of our bodies. – These bodies, subject to weakness, pain, and death, will be conformed to His glorious Body. St. John Chrysostom observes that Paul's description of our present humiliation

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concerns the suffering and corruption to which the body is exposed – the promise is that this same body will be made incorruptible.

There is great comfort here for anyone who knows the frustration of illness, the limitations of advancing age, or the sorrow of watching someone they love grow weaker. – Our Lord has taken our humanity to Himself. – He has borne suffering in His own Body and risen victorious from the grave. – We may therefore entrust our whole selves to Him. The future He promises gives us reason to care kindly for one another now, especially where human weakness is most apparent.

We bring that hope with us to the altar. In the Holy Communion, Christ feeds us with the life we could never provide for ourselves. We offer Him "ourselves, our souls and bodies," placing the whole of our earthly life within His service. And when the priest bids, "Lift up your hearts," we answer, "We lift them up unto the Lord." Our hearts are being directed toward the One whose grace enables us to return to our daily responsibilities with renewed faithfulness and love.

As the Christian year draws toward its close, the Church will increasingly turn our attention to the coming of our Lord. Advent

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will soon give that expectation its particular prayers and discipline. This morning, we can begin quietly, by considering what it means to await someone we love. We make room for him. We attend to what has been neglected. We arrange our lives with his arrival in view. – Our preparation for Christ begins in much the same way – through repentance, prayer, and the faithful fulfilment of the duties already before us.

We belong to Christ, and we await Him. May that knowledge give us courage in our responsibilities, freedom from the things that would master us, and patience in the weaknesses we must bear. And may He grant us grace to live today as citizens of the kingdom whose fullness we hope to share.

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