Mingling as Sacred Mission
Fr. Jack Schuler

So today we heard that familiar gospel about, “Do we pay the census tax to Caesar?” And Jesus answers, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's”. He didn't answer the question. He actually upped the ante. He didn't want to talk about taxes. He wanted to talk about something deeper and more important. As he said, “Who's on the coin?” Caesar. Caesar and the Romans believed that Caesar was God. And so this is about who's God. And so there's no need to render anything to a pagan god like Caesar but rather render to the true God. And so Caesar was known for his power and his prosperity, whereas our God is known for healing and compassion. Those two commandments, love God, love your neighbor as yourself.

And so we see what that neighborliness can do, that mingling with others can do by the example in the first reading. Cyrus was a Persian king who conquered the Babylonians who had conquered the Jews and exiled them. He liberated the Jews. And 50 years later, he helped repatriate them back to Jerusalem, to the Holy Land, to help them build the temple and rebuild their city. So we have this Gentile helping the Jews, rendering what God wants, that neighborliness, that mingling with others, not yourself.

And so we have a Caesar, President Trump. He doesn't know if he's God, but he believes he's the greatest president ever. And he's known for power and prosperity. He's not known for healing and compassion. And he's known more for anonymous vengeance, torture, killing, vilification of others. And he wants only to hang around the people that believe what he believes. Our God believes in mingling and moving out of that comfort zone, of just being with people that I know are going to agree with me and be the same way as me.

Today we celebrate Mission Sunday, where we remember those in other lands. Remember those who are cross-cultural ministers and missionaries. And having been a missionary myself, I know that when you move into another culture, you're changed. The customs are different. The church is different. The country is different. And you're going to be different because you mingle. That mingling is so important. And hopefully our missionaries can help us recognize the goodness of others and bring back some of what they can bring to our church here in the United States. I had a friend a few weeks ago and he goes to the prisons, he does retreats in the prisons with a bunch of men. And he wanted to tell me a story about this one prisoner who was a great big guy. He was a gang member, killed somebody. And was in prison, and he got into so much trouble at that prison with the gang that they moved him out to the prison where the retreat was taking place. And he was talking to this man. And he said that he was in solitary confinement for so long because of what he did in the

prison. And I don't know about what goes on, but he said that sometimes these people yell out “Jesus” in the halls there, and then somebody put a Bible through the slot, he started reading the Bible. And so he changed. And when he got out of solitary confinement, he didn't join the gang. And the gang leader came to him and said, “What's going on? Why aren't you with us?” He said, “I can't do that anymore.” The gang member, the gang leader said to him, “I forgive you.” The guy that told me the story was crying. What can happen to people who mingle with God and mingle with others and then mingle with me? That's so important that we move out of those kinds of comfort zones and mingle. God believes in mingling.

I came upon an interesting plaque in the second largest synagogue in the world. The plaque, ironically, is dedicated to Antonio Giuseppe Roncalli, who became Pope John XXIII. And so in this synagogue is this plaque that says,

> While Papal Delegate in Turkey and Greece during the Holocaust, Monsignor Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli undertook numerous efforts to save the lives of European Jews. He made impassioned pleas to senior Church leaders, including Pope Pius XII, and to officials and heads of state of different countries to intervene to stop the deportation and murder of Jews. In 1944, he made special efforts to rescue Hungarian Jews by transmitting money, forged documents, and vital information through Monsignor Angelo Rotta.
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> As Pope John XXIII, Roncalli commissioned and supported the drafting of a declaration to promote reconciliation between Catholics and Jews. A landmark declaration, *Nostra Aetate*, which was adopted by the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican two years after his death, which stated that the Jewish people were not responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus, were not rejected by God, that anti-Semitism should be deplored.

I think that Pope John XXIII could not have done that If he had not mingled with Jews to see what kind of people they are. And so sometimes it has a dramatic effect. And then here's this plaque in the second largest synagogue in the world to our Pope. And so we mingle.

One final word on famous Henry Nouwen, spiritualist. He had a friend named Adam. Adam had Down syndrome. And he said anyone who came close to Adam was healed in some part of their lives. Let's mingle.