

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A – 22nd October 2023

'Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar – and to God what belongs to God'

We should notice that the question that Jesus is asked about the payment of taxes is framed to force him into an 'either or' response. 'Is it permissible to pay taxes to Caesar or not?' But notice that the response he makes to it is not an 'either or' but a 'both and' response.

Whilst it is true that some of the central questions of our faith demand an 'either, or' response, for instance: "Is Jesus the Son of God" or not?" it is also true that in the spiritual order, things are not always quite so simple. Very often questions relating to faith and practice invite a 'both, and' response.

The Roman coin bore the image of Caesar. If we consider ourselves as coins, whose image do we bear? We are coins minted by God and we bear his image, yet in our lives, if we are honest the image of God cannot always clearly be seen. Our vocation is to keep examining those "coins" of our lives to see in them the image of God. In baptism the cross of Jesus is branded on our foreheads and so we are an icon or image of Jesus in the midst of this world. Does this make any difference? It should – it should say a lot to us about the way we live and spend our money and schedule our time and so on. So in what ways is your life and mine an icon or image of Jesus?

The second part of Jesus' response to his questioners 'Give to God what belongs to God' has serious implications for all of us. We must put God first in our lives – in all areas of our lives. There must be no fenced off areas where He is second, or third; or areas where God is not allowed to enter at all.

Giving to God requires fidelity to our political and social duties, but always according to the spirit of the Gospel, since everything ultimately depends on God. We must all live our lives in the social context in which we find ourselves, but always in obedience to the teaching of the Gospel and the doctrines of the Church.

This is not a matter of 'either or' but of 'both and.' Jesus is inviting us to ponder deeply the tensions we often experience in our lives between giving to Caesar and giving to God and to do our best to become the currency of God's life in the world. The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us that: "The vocation of humanity is to show forth the image of God and to be transformed into the image of the Father's only Son. "

Today, Jesus is asking us whether we have invested our hearts in the right place, in Him. There is really only one way to find out where our hearts are. Let us check our daily choices, the little ones as well the big ones, and look for the patterns: What do we usually do when decision time comes for where we will spend our prime time and our best energies? These are the infallible indicators of what we truly value, and what we don't.

In these days when everything around us screams out that image is the only thing which matters, Jesus says to the Church "YES" ... image IS the most important thing – not a superficial skin-deep image to impress people, but the true image and likeness of God. You and I are called to be like newly minted coins and draw others to the love of Christ, so that the image of God will be seen afresh. We should be a people of integrity and wholeness with no hypocrisy. We are called to become what God has made us to be, a holy people set apart for him. A people which reflects the image and likeness of God to whom everything, including Caesar, belongs.