

GOSPEL

MATTHEW 22:15-21

The Pharisees went away to work out between them how to trap Jesus in what he said. And they sent their disciples to him, together with the Herodians, to say, 'Master, we know that you are an honest man and teach the way of God in an honest way, and that you are not afraid of anyone, because a man's rank means nothing to you. Tell us your opinion then. Is it permissible to pay taxes to Caesar or not?' But Jesus was aware of their malice and replied, 'You hypocrites! Why do you set this trap for me? Let me see the money you pay the tax with.' They handed him a denarius, and he replied, 'Whose head is this? Whose name?' 'Caesar's,' they replied. He then said to them, 'Very well, give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar - and to God what belongs to God.'

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

This Sunday's Gospel presents to us a new face-to-face encounter between Jesus and his adversaries. The theme addressed is that of the tribute to Caesar: a "thorny" issue about whether or not it was lawful to pay taxes to the Roman Emperor, to whom Palestine was subject in Jesus' time. There were various positions. Thus, the question that the Pharisees posed to him — "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" — was meant to ensnare the Teacher. In fact, depending on how he responded, he could have been accused of being either for or against Rome.

But in this case too, Jesus responds calmly and takes advantage of the malicious question in order to teach an important lesson, rising above the polemics and the alliance of his adversaries. He tells the Pharisees: "Show me the money for the tax". They present him a coin, and, observing the coin, Jesus asks: "Whose likeness and inscription is this?". The Pharisees can only answer: "Caesar's". Then Jesus concludes: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's". On the one hand, suggesting they return to the emperor what belongs to him, Jesus

declares that paying tax is not an act of idolatry, but a legal obligation to the earthly authority; on the other — and it is here that Jesus presents the "thrust" of his response: recalling the primacy of God, he asks them to render to Him that which is His due as the Lord of the life and history of mankind.

The reference to Caesar's image engraved on the coin says that it is right that they feel fully — with rights and duties — citizens of the State; but symbolically it makes them think about the other image that is imprinted on every man and woman: the image of God. He is the Lord of all, and we, who were created "in his image" belong to Him first and foremost. From the question posed to him by the Pharisees, Jesus draws a more radical and vital question for each of us, a question we can ask ourselves: *to whom do I belong?* To family, to the city, to friends, to work, to politics, to the State? Yes, of course. But first and foremost — Jesus reminds us — you belong to God. This is the fundamental belonging. It is He who has given you all that you are and have. And therefore, day by day, we can and must live our life in recognition of this fundamental belonging and in heartfelt gratitude toward our Father, who creates each one of us individually, unrepeatable, but always according to the image of his beloved Son, Jesus. It is a wondrous mystery.

Christians are called to commit themselves concretely in the human and social spheres without comparing "God" and "Caesar"; comparing God and Caesar would be a fundamentalist approach. Christians are called to commit themselves concretely in earthly realities, but illuminating them with the light that comes from God. The primary entrustment to God and hope in him do not imply an escape from reality, but rather the diligent rendering to God that which belongs to him. This is why a believer looks to the future reality, that of God, so as to live earthly life to the fullest, and to meet its challenges with courage.

May the Virgin Mary help us to always live in conformity with the image of

God that we bear within us, inside, also offering our contribution to the building of the earthly city.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Jesus implies that the coin belongs to Caesar. To whom do you belong?
- What does it mean to 'belong to God'? How could this impact your life?
- Christians are called to commit themselves concretely in earthly realities, but illuminating them with the light that comes from God. How might you do this in your workplace?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.