

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 said, '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.'

HOMILY OF ST JOHN PAUL II*21 October 1990, Excerpt*

1. Jesus' incisive statement: "Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mt 22:21) responds to a much-discussed issue in his time and still deeply felt today. What attitude should believers have towards civil authority and the laws of the State? What commitment should they assume as citizens with regard to their duties in the social and political fields?

The opportunity presented itself to Jesus in the face of a then-widely debated question about the legality or otherwise of paying tribute to the Roman emperor. Indeed, positions were diverse, and so were the reasons given to support the legality or illegality of the taxes imposed by the Romans.

In this context, the question posed to Jesus by the Pharisees: "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" constituted a threat to the Master, considered by all as the One who taught the way of God according to truth.

As sometimes happens in the Gospel, when faced with a trap set for him by his enemies, Jesus, with his response, rises above the contingent controversy and goes well beyond particular and divergent positions.

On the one hand, by commanding Caesar to return what belongs to him, he declares that paying the tax is not an act of idolatry, but a duty of honest citizens; on

the other, by recalling the primacy of God in human life and in history, he asks that he be given back what is due to him as the one and only true "Lord."

2. With this statement, Jesus makes a clear distinction between the duties required of believers, as citizens and as children of God. He does not, however, place them in conflict. Thus, from a specific question, such as that of the tribute to be paid to Caesar, new horizons emerge for the mission of Christians in society.

By virtue of faith, each of you is called to transform history, to permeate all human and social reality with the spirit of the Gospel. No one can or should shy away from the required task of working to ensure a more just and fraternal civil coexistence. This task must be carried out, however, in full fidelity to the Gospel message, in docile submission to the Spirit, without ever shirking the requirements of the laws of the State that pursue this goal. It must be done above all by giving primacy to what comes first: God, his plan of salvation, his law, spiritual and transcendent values.

The profession of faith in Christ, belonging to the kingdom of God and the lifestyle that flows from it must be lived not "outside" but "within" history as a "service" to be rendered to the city of man and therefore to the common good and the integral promotion of every person.

Faith, lived fully, pushes you to take on strong and precise responsibilities in that immense human effort aimed at promoting and safeguarding fundamental human rights for a peaceful and supportive coexistence among all.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: Jesus refuses to choose between faith and civic responsibility. What does his answer reveal about the relationship between our duties as citizens and our identity as disciples?



Heart: The coin bears Caesar's image and belongs to Caesar. But you bear God's image. What might Jesus be inviting you to give back to God more fully?



Hands: St John Paul II reminds us that faith is meant to be lived within history, not apart from it. How can you bring the values of the Gospel into your workplace, community, or daily responsibilities this week?

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 (for example, "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Offer 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 praying the 'Glory Be'.