

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

GOSPEL

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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.'

(Matthew 22:15–21)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The Herodians are mentioned only three times in the New Testament as a group within Jewish society (Mark 3:6; Mark 12:13; Matthew 22:16). In all three texts, they are aligned with the Pharisees in trying to entrap Jesus. They may have been supporters of the rule and policies of Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, ruler of Galilee during Jesus' lifetime.
- The first 'Caesar' was Gaius Julius Caesar, a Roman general, who emerged from the civil wars as the sole ruler of the Empire in 45 BC. After his murder the following year, his grand-nephew Octavian (Augustus) took over as ruler and adopted the name 'Caesar'. From then onwards, all rulers of the empire were known as 'Caesar'. The Caesar during Jesus' public ministry was Tiberias.

EXPLORING THE WORD

This was an interesting question posed to Jesus. Given the political and religious structures of the society in which he lived, this was a no-win situation!

Jews were required to pay a denarius (a day's wage) to the Roman overlords and were also required to pay a half-shekel (a standard silver coin) tax towards the running of the temple.

If Jesus had answered 'yes', he could have been accused of betraying his religious duty. If he had answered 'no', he could have been reported to the Roman authorities for inciting others not to pay their taxes. This was a trick indeed.

Jesus' answer makes clear that there are obligations to the state for any citizen but also makes clear that there are obligations to God. The coin bears Caesar's image and therefore belongs to him, but the whole of creation bears the imprint of God. The first loyalty of all created things is therefore to God.

- What are our obligations to the state? To God?
- How impact does the Christian vision for the world and all its people have on how Christians live in the world and how they view the role of the state?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- At first reading, we may be tempted to think that Jesus is separating religious behaviour from political or economic behaviour. A closer reading, however, shows that this is not the case. While Jesus gives due weight to civic and political duties, his instruction to 'Give to God what is God's' reminds us that there is no aspect of human life or activity that can be considered apart from God. To seek and honour God, the believer must work within the world.
- What belongs to God in your life? What are our duties towards the state?
- Are our religious lives separate from our secular lives? Should we bring our religious values to the way we live in our world? There is much food for thought and discussion in this question.
- Our society has become very secular, and faith in God is often seen as irrelevant or somehow old-fashioned and quaint. Share your experiences of any difficulties you may encounter with your life as a believer in Christ being separated from your day-to-day life. Are there ways to integrate these more?
- This week, as you watch or read the news, try to judge the various reports and breaking stories according to the Gospel. What would Jesus' response have been? Is that the response of our political, economic or civic leaders? What is your response?

