

**“Give to Caesar What Belongs to Caesar:”
Politics and Preaching**

by
Fr. Jim Schmitmeyer

A former preaching student of mine asked for a critique of a homily on Matthew 22:15-21.
Below is my response followed by a copy of the homily he submitted for my review.

Dear Hank,

Thank you for the opportunity to critique your homily on “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” You are prudent in asking for feedback, especially when the topic is potentially divisive or easily misconstrued. Of course, you might want to seek someone else’s opinion since I had a parishioner walk out on one of my homilies regarding immigration a few weeks ago! (You can find it in my website archives under the title, “From Militia to Mercy)

There were many elements in your homily that I very much enjoyed, especially the section on Dwight Eisenhower (my, what a different society we were back then!). If I were you, I would open with this section. Currently, the homily begins with a brief but abstract lecture on the foundational principles of our country, then reiterates (basically, repeats) the gospel narrative. This will not grab your listener’s attention. Also, it prepares them to expect something of a talk-show opinion piece. More on that later.

An alternate way of opening the homily would be to take a quarter from your pocket and note that there is no image of Caesar, but there are the words, “In God we trust.” Then add this section from your first draft:

Ever wonder how those words got on our money?

Let me tell you.

In 1956, two years after pushing

to have the phrase “under God”

inserted into the pledge of allegiance,

President Dwight D. Eisenhower

signs a law officially declaring

“In God We Trust” to be the nation’s official motto.

As a listener in your congregation, I would find this information interesting and intriguing. Also, it doesn’t—by itself—cast you in an ideological light. Your goal is to remain rooted in a theological, as opposed to ideological, stance.

The basic premise of your draft compares God’s Law to our national laws. I commend you for your clear and concise presentation of this dilemma but, while it is a pertinent and timely message, it is also one that is well-worn and, in my reading of your draft, a bit defensive in tone. More importantly, this presents the listener with a political treatise rather than a call to a deep, soul-level conversion. Let me offer an alternative approach for you to consider.

I recently read an article by Scott Sauls which tackles the same basic topic. Instead of offering an either/or option, however, Sauls presents the listener with a we-can-do-better option. Since our coins have the “In God we trust” motto instead of an image of Caesar, this offers a great opportunity to use that quarter from your pocket as an instigation to move your parishioners to live up to putting **God** first, not money, achievement, power, entitlement, individualism, etc.

Below is an excerpt from the Sauls’ article. (You can read the article in full here: <http://annvoskamp.com/2017/10/the-verdict-is-in-god-favors-the-weak/>)

*In America, credentials qualify a person to lead. **In Jesus, the chief qualification is character.***

*In America, what matters most are the results we produce. **In Jesus, what matters most is the kind of people we are becoming.***

*In America, success is measured by material accumulation, power, and the positions that we hold. **In Jesus, success is measured by material generosity, humility, and the people whom we serve.***

*In America, it is shameful to come in last and laudable to come in first. **In Jesus, the first will be last and the last will be first.***

*In America, leaders make a name for themselves to become famous and sometimes treat Jesus as a means to that end. **In Jesus, leaders make His name famous and treat their own positions, abilities, and influence as a means to that end.***

*In America, leaders crave recognition and credit. **In Jesus, leaders think less of themselves and give credit to others.***

*In America, leaders compare and compete so they will flourish. **In Jesus, leaders sacrifice and serve so others will flourish.***

*In America, leadership often means “My glory and happiness at your expense.” **In Jesus, leadership always means “Your growth and wholeness at my expense.”***

*In America, the strong and powerful rise to the top. **In Jesus, the meek inherit the earth.***

You might wish to quote some of these we-can-do-better insights from Scott Saul or, without too much trouble, you could recast the points included in your preliminary draft in a similar pattern. This would then allow you to close the homily with a reference to your opening image of the coin. Below is a realignment of some of your paragraphs to consider as your conclusion:

The image of Caesar does not appear on our money. Instead, we have a reminder of God in whose image we are created.

*It will not be long before coins & currency will no longer be used
I don't see “In God we trust” printed on all debit cards*

But we all have God's image in us, the only way to true happiness is to put God first.

The closer we come to God, the more we become friends of God, the more we want to give to God

*who gave everything to us in the
first place.*

Caesar will not welcome us to eternity.

But God will be.

So, give to God what belongs to God!

I hope you find my comments helpful, Hank, or at least thought-provoking. Know that you are in my prayers. Please remember me in yours!

In Him,

Jim

Homily Oct 22 2017

Matthew 22 15-21

Our lives are built
on a foundation
to support us
To Hold us up
To Keep us grounded

God

Faith

Family

Country

The founding fathers
of this great country
Built this nation
On these principles

One nation under god
In god we trust

In today's Gospel from Matthew,
the Pharisees and Herodians
are trying to find
a crack in Jesus's foundation
They are deliberately plotting
against Jesus

First they speak to Jesus,
what they say about Jesus is true.
Jesus is truthful,
teaches the way of God
and doesn't regard a person's status.

But it was obvious to Jesus
that this was all part of their trap.
They are pretending to be
on the side of Jesus

they ask a question
about whether or not
to pay tax to Caesar
because they think
no matter what way Jesus answers
he will get himself into trouble.

Jesus sees through their malice.
What a word Matthew uses
to describe them.
They have malice,

they are malicious.

Jesus himself reprimands them
Why are you testing me, you hypocrites?”
The word “hypocrite” says it all.
A hypocrite was the name
for an actor on the Greek stage at that time.
The hypocrite would simply wear
a face mask to play the role on stage.
Jesus is saying they are false,
they are wearing masks in front of him
but behind their masks
they are entirely different.
They are trying to trick Jesus

The question they ask Jesus
Is it lawful to pay the census tax
to Caesar or not?

Jesus reply...
Whose image is on the coin
and whose inscription?
They replied..... Caesar
Then Jesus says
repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar
and to God what belongs to God

Jesus' reply to their question
was masterful.
This reply from Jesus
has been used
all through the centuries

to teach us
to act as good citizens
in our country.

Obviously we do this
by paying our taxes,
defending our country,
voting,
and obeying and respecting The laws.

For as long as you live in this world
you are subject to the laws
of the countries where you are.

All authority comes from God
who desires the world we live in
To have order.

But if it is important to respect
the law of the land,
for the sake of peace,
is it not more important
to respect the law of God
for God's sake
and for your own sake too?

our country is to serve
its loyal citizens
by taking only what belongs to it
and leaving to God
what belongs to God.

God gives life

and only God
can take that life again.
It is not up to a country
to decide that its unborn
whose lives come from God
can be killed while in the womb.

Marriage is from God.
We hear many discussions
about redefining marriage.
Any discussion which does not give to God
what belongs to God
is not a complete discussion.

How can a country
which claims to be a Christian country,
founded on Christian principles,
ignore what belongs to God
when making important decisions?

We do not want to be like
those in the Gospel
who came to Jesus
and said nice things about him
but it was only a mask on their faces
to cover their real selves.

American history demonstrates repeatedly
that this nation was founded
on Christian principles
And a belief in God
Its founding fathers
wished to acknowledge that fact

all over Washington D.C.
it's buildings,
official documents,
and historical speeches.

Less than a hundred years
after its Declaration of Independence,
In God We Trust
was printed on our money
As a symbol of this
Founding belief

America is a free nation,
and freedom of religion
is still guaranteed
in the Constitution's First Amendment.

One of the first references
of the motto
"In God We Trust"
is heard in the National Anthem,
The Star-Spangled Banner.
written by Francis Scott Key in 1814

President Thomas Jefferson wrote
The God who gave us life
gave us liberty at the same time"
and he asked
Can the liberties of a nation be secure
when we have removed
a conviction that these liberties

are of God?"

At a Flag Day speech in 1954,
President Dwight Eisenhower
Said about the place of religion
in public life
when he discussed why
he had wanted to include
“under God”
in the pledge of allegiance

He said
In this way
we are reaffirming
the transcendence of religious faith
in America’s heritage and future;
in this way we shall constantly strengthen
those spiritual weapons
which forever will be
our country’s
most powerful resource
in peace and war.”

"I pledge allegiance
to the Flag
of the United States of America,
and to the Republic

for which it stands,

one Nation
under God,
indivisible,

with liberty and justice for all."

in 1956,
two years after pushing
to have the phrase
"under God"
inserted into the pledge of allegiance,
President Dwight D. Eisenhower
signs a law officially declaring
"In God We Trust"
to be the nation's official motto.

It's interesting that the Gospel reading today
Is about Ceasars inscription
on a coin During the Roman Empire

What is inscribed
on the Currency
of our country
IN GOD WE TRUST

It will not be long
Before coins & currency
Will no longer be used
I don't see
In God we trust
Printed on all debit cards

Our society and culture today
Is all about Political correctness
Not offending anyone
Not hurting someone's feelings

Just because someone
Doesn't believe in God
Doesn't mean that
Under God
In God we Trust
Prayer
Must be removed
As a founding principle Of this nation

Was Jesus ever worried
About political correctness?
Was Jesus worried about
Hurting someone's feelings
Who believed differently Than him

He never wavered
From his founding principles

Jesus did not wear a mask

Their will always be those
who oppose giving to God
what belongs to God.

But we all have God's image in us,
We were all made
In the likeness of God

we belong to God,
and the only way to true happiness
is to put God first.

The closer we come to God,
the more we become friends of God,
the more we want to give to God
who gave everything to us
in the first place.

Caesar will not be there
to welcome us to eternity
or to judge how we lived.

We give to God because
we are giving back to God
who first loved us
and gave us everything we have
and because we look forward
to all eternity with God.

Let us never forget
Where we came from
And where we are going

Our foundation is being tested
It is up to us
To stand firm
On that foundation

God
Faith
Family
Country

Give to everyone
the consideration

and respect
they deserve,
but always place
God above men
and above all things.

Give to God what belongs to God.