

From the Homily Library of Fr. Callistus Iyorembor

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A – October 19, 2020

Caesar & God

Our Gospel passage for today is from Mathew's Gospel. Jesus is in Jerusalem prior to His death. The forces of darkness that have opposed Him; opposed His teaching are closing in on Him. We are approaching His Passion.

Today Jesus encounters a set of opponents whose purpose is to destroy Him. This should not surprise us because the Gospels actually end with the destruction of Jesus; we say the Crucifixion of Jesus. These opponents of Jesus, these forces of Darkness that are closing in on Jesus we identified as the Pharisees.

Here is how they approached Jesus: *"Teacher, we know that you are a truthful man and that you teach the way of God in accordance with truth. And you are not concerned with anyone's opinion, for you do not regard a person's status. Tell us then, what is your opinion; is it lawful to pay tax to Caesar or not?"*

This is an old game isn't it? They are setting Him up by buttering Him up. They flattered Him first. Through this flattery they felt they had set for Him a *perfect verbal trap*. *"Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"* These Pharisees not only put Jesus on the spot but they are actually asking Him a *trap question*. This question was a very serious one because it was targeting one thing: getting Jesus in trouble with the authorities. For if Jesus had said it was lawful, He would be regarded as a traitor to the Jewish cause and the Jewish religion. Every Jew would hate Him. On the other hand, if He said it was unlawful, He could be denounced as fomenting rebellion against Rome. Either way He would get in trouble.

Jesus is a clever man. I love the way He dealt with men who wanted to, according to the law of Moses, stone to death the woman caught in adultery. Read John Chapter 8 when you get a chance.

In today's case, Jesus says to bring Him the coin and asks whose image appears on it? They said "Caesar's." He then said to them "*Give to Caesar, what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.*"

Jesus saw through their ploy, but instead of ignoring or humiliating them, He taught them a lesson. And that lesson is as valid today as it was at during His time. Jesus told them: "*Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God.*" I said this lesson is very relevant today because this dynamic that exists between the Church and the State still exists in our world today. Every Christian holds dual citizenship, each one of which has its own responsibilities.

Our birth made us citizens of an earthly nation; our baptism made us citizens of a heavenly Kingdom. At baptism we become Children of God and members of His holy Church and consequently joint heirs of God's Kingdom.

But today Christ is reminding us that, as far as possible, we need to live out both citizenships responsibly. "*Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God.*"

How can we do this? How we can be good citizens of earth, giving to Caesar what belongs to him, as well as good citizens in Christ's Kingdom, giving to God what belongs to Him?

The Duties of Heavenly Citizenship

Let's start with the duties of heavenly citizenship. What exactly belongs to God? Do we owe any taxes to the heavenly IRS?

Heavenly citizenship - giving to God what belongs to God means:

- obeying His commandments
- following the example of Christ and the Saints
- heeding the teachings of His Church, including its social teaching

- practicing the seven Corporal Works of Mercy – ministering to the hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless, sick, imprisoned and dead
- spending quality time with Jesus, not when we are tired

How about the duties of Earthly Citizenship?

What does giving to Caesar look like for us today? What is included in our responsibility to the State?

- voting in the November 3 election
- praying for our nation
- paying our taxes
- being good citizens
- driving responsibly.