

*22nd Sunday after Pentecost- EF 2013*  
*Matthew 22: 15-21*  
*Dcn. Pat Hall*

For the sick, marginalized, vulnerable and oppressed, Jesus offered hope and freedom.

For the Pharisees, Herodians and others in power, that was a problem. Proclamations like “The Kingdom is at hand,” “The first shall be last and the last shall be first,” and “He has cast down the mighty from their thrones” ... well, these could prove to be dangerous to the precarious stability of Judea under Roman rule.

What to do? The Trap.

It is interesting how human nature hasn't changed in 2000 years. Haven't we seen something similar at our workplace, at school, in our extended family, even at various parishes we've attended?

First, the antagonists flatter Jesus, set him up so that he would be easier to take down. They tell Jesus that he speaks the truth no matter the position of the man to whom he's speaking.

Then they spring the trap, putting Jesus in an “either/or” situation. Does he refuse to pay the tax to a government which has the power to kill him or does he acquiesce and put himself at odds with the Jewish position that only the Temple is to receive the tithe?

Jesus' simple retort reminds us of the value of cleverness in dealing with a hostile world. He had them produce a Roman coin, the only kind of currency that would be acceptable to pay the Roman tax. His statement is remembered throughout the ages and used in uncounted situations by people getting entangled in “either/or” situations:

*Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's;  
and to God, the things that are God's.*

By this, Jesus evades the trap. But even more so, he elevates the stakes.

Pay the tax? Yes, but the wrong question is being asked.

The important question is not about one's political allegiance, whether one supports the Roman occupiers or the Jewish nationalists. It is about one's allegiance to God. It is God who created all in love. It is to God that all loyalty, faith, honor and love are due. What do you pay to God?

Jesus answered their irrelevant question and left them with a meaningful one. The irrelevant question had to do with one's position regarding the Roman occupation and nationalism. The relevant question had to do with one's position with God.

So what is your position with God? The obvious answer is “sitting in a pew”. That means something. It minimally means that you had to get up and do what you had to do to get here. That might not take so much for some, but for others with aching joints or for others who have a deep emotional ache, getting here might take everything they’ve got.

But taking Jesus’ cue of finding the next most relevant question can lead us to some new revelation. Asking the next most relevant question can lead us to new understanding. It helps us practice Jesus’ commandment to love God and neighbor with all your heart, all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.

So, why come here? To pray.

Just you? No, with others who come here to worship.

Just those here? Well, we usually come to this Mass, but we are part of St. Mary’s Parish. And of course we are family with our sister parishes in the diocese and part of one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

These answers can be revealing. I remember when I realized I was part of one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

I was a freshman at college and had just met a very interesting Catholic girl. I had been raised Lutheran, and so we had some interesting discussions on religion. Question led to question. I was really struck when she spoke about a whole world of people who were praying for me, for all of us. I came to realize there were nuns in cloistered cells, monks in distant lands, clergy and lay faithful the world over who were praying for me... me, unknown and anonymous. But, never-the-less, they knew I was out there somewhere and they were praying for me.

Now I had been raised as a faithful Christian. I had a sense of a personal relationship with Jesus. But that new revelation brought me to a new appreciation of Church. It was one of the foundational blocks that lead me to the Catholic Church.

And that interesting girl? Well, again, questions led to questions and she is now the grandmother of my grandchildren.

These searching questions lead to deeper relationships with God and God’s family. They guide our pilgrimage to our ultimate destination, to rest in the loving heart of God.

Yes, we come here to pray and worship. And then we are sent forth on a mission, on that pilgrimage as a people, to be God’s presence to the world.

Whatever the mission, one must have on-going prayer as its foundation.

In addition to coming to Mass, one can join with other parishioners at weekly Holy Hour or our monthly Family Formation evenings. With others in the diocese, one can participate in the Living Rosary sponsored by St. Mary's. Promise to pray a decade daily knowing that others unseen are praying other decades as a complete offering to our Father.

With prayer and contribution you can support World Missions. You could be the one I heard about when I was in college who was supporting the unknown and anonymous out there in need, just because you know they are there.

It is about God calling you to be in him and he in you. That is the question Jesus was answering when he said to *render unto God the things that are God's*. You are God's. Give him your very self. Share yourself with your neighbor. Share, as God shares his very self at this altar. You are simply following Jesus' example as he offered himself on the cross for love of God and for love of you.