



**Twenty-ninth Sunday of Ordinary Time**  
**October 18, 2020**  
**Matthew 22:15-21**

### **Background on the Gospel:**

This is the classic text about giving to God what belongs to God and to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. Notice that the two realms are clearly delineated – Caesar has a more limited scope than God. Jesus is subtly suggesting that we should see everything about our lives as giving total allegiance to God. Within that all-encompassing and all-embracing reality, there is the “subset” we should render or give back to Caesar.

Jews and Christians believe that God works through human history. After the Jews had been exiled in Babylon for approximately 70 years, they were released when the Persians replaced the Chaldeans. They saw the new Persian King Cyrus as the “agent” of God’s will and providence. In truth, Cyrus simply wanted all the different refugee groups to go back to their own native country rather than stay in Babylon. God works through such human agents on every level and in every age. Sacred history happens *within* human history. So it is that Jesus counsels paying proper deference to Caesar while yet giving our whole heart to God.

The set-up for today’s Gospel is a religious group (the Pharisees) and a political group (the Herodian’s): the Pharisees believed that no tribute should be paid to the Roman government while the Herodian’s obviously went along with whatever was politically expedient. These two groups did not have much in common except for a disdain for Jesus; they were trying to entrap Him by their insincere questions.

Jesus’ answer about paying the tax to Caesar is rather illusive and balanced. He deflects the question to focus on the Kingdom of God as the highest priority. The key moment came when He asked them to produce the coin used for the tax: the very fact that they were carrying the coin meant that they had “bought into” the system.

In the rest of the New Testament, (Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2) respect is advised to the civil order so that the Church can function and flourish in relative peace. That is where we stand today: pay taxes and vote etc. but leave the rest to God.

### **Thoughts for prayer and reflection:**

- 1) What are my priorities? Certainly we all pay taxes out of fear of going to jail but we don’t necessarily always give God the time He deserves in prayer. Think about that contrast.
- 2) What might someone find in my pockets? Based on what was pulled out of my pockets (or purse), what would they say about me and my values?
- 3) Do I care about the civic government and do I pray for civic leaders? Do I work for the common good? Do I bring political questions into my prayer life and pray for wisdom and guidance from God in how to vote and how to be perhaps more involved in advocacy for causes I believe are important?