

XXIII SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY 2015

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

St. MATTHEW 22.15



“In God We Trust” is the official motto of the United States. The motto first appeared on US coins in 1864 and on US paper money in 1957.

President Theodore Roosevelt took issue with using God’s name on coinage because he considered it to be sacrilege. In 1907 the motto did not appear on newly minted \$20 gold pieces. It was quickly restored later the same year after a public outcry.

The motto “In God We trust” does not give our coins and currency more buying power...but it does say we should place our trust in God first and everything else comes second.

In today’s Gospel some men come to Jesus. They first try to get him to let his guard down with disingenuous flattery about what a smart guy he is...and then ask him a question about paying taxes.

Taxes were paid in coins that bore the image of Caesar. The coins were also inscribed with the words “the king is god”. That was a problem for Jews, whose only King was God, whom they called by the special name YAHWEH. Calling a human king a god was a form of idolatry for the Jews.

Jews didn’t even want to touch a coin with the king’s image on it because it made them feel like they were participating in idol worship. They also did not like having to pay taxes to a pagan government.

The men in the Gospel ask Jesus if it is OK to pay taxes. They are hoping for a yes or no answer. If he said yes...they could accuse him of promoting sacrilege. If he said no...they could accuse him of treason against the Roman government.

Jesus is not fooled by the attempt to trick him. Rather than giving the yes or no answer the men hoped for...Jesus asks them to show him the coin they use to pay taxes. He tells them to give to God what belongs to God and give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. The men went away shaking their heads...their attempt to trap Jesus failed.

We all pay taxes every time we go to the grocery store, fill up the car, or buy a house. We have taxes withheld from our paychecks...and often grumble. None of us here would say what a wonderful thing it is to pay taxes. None of us like to pay taxes, but we do, because it is the right thing to do. If we are looking for a definitive answer from Jesus about paying taxes...today’s Gospel gives us that answer.

Jesus wants us to do the right thing and paying taxes helps keep our government strong and able to fund programs that reach out to people in need of assistance. We may not always agree with our government leaders but we believe in a God who created order out of chaos...and supporting our government through paying taxes helps maintain order and avoid chaos.

But the Gospel is more than a story about paying taxes where Jesus gets the upper hand against some not-so-clever men trying to trick him. It’s about putting God first in our lives. It’s about loving God with our whole being. It’s about loving other people too, because that’s how we show we love God and trust him.

For many years the US Mint resisted the idea of minting coins with images of presidents or other historic figures. The Lincoln Cent, first minted in 1909, was the first coin to be minted with the image of a president. It is still being minted today...and has always been engraved with the motto “In God We Trust”.

“In God We Trust”...it’s a good motto for our country...it’s a good motto for us to live by...whether or not it appears on our coins or currency. Let’s stop for a minute to think what it means to trust God as we should.

Give first to God what belongs to him...the source of all we have. Trust him to provide us with the work and money we need to live...and to share our blessings with others less fortunate...and to even pay our taxes.

The rest...will simply take care of itself.

