

XXIII SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY 2018

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

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ST. MATTHEW 22.15



Remember...that which you give to God is deductible from that which you give to Caesar...from a cartoon that has hung in the Vesting Sacristy for many years.

While not exactly pertaining to the Gospel...the quip does have to do with what we give to God...through our contributions to the Parish. We should remind ourselves all good gifts we have belong to God...he just lets us use them. We should give to God what is rightfully his in the first place.

Taxes...on the other hand...are something we would rather not pay. But if we are looking for a way out of paying taxes...we're not going to get the answer we might hope for from Jesus...and neither did the Pharisees in today's Gospel.

The Pharisees in the Gospel had a legitimate reason for not wanting to pay taxes...their country was occupied by a foreign power who's king claimed to be God. The Roman Denarius...the coin used to pay taxes...had Caesar's image and the words "the king is god" engraved on it...blasphemy to the Jews. Only Yahweh was God!

However, the question the Pharisees put to Jesus about paying taxes was intended to trick Jesus into saying something they could use against him. His popularity had grown and he was attracting crowds. He threatened their cozy relationship with the Roman government. They wanted to get rid of him once and for all.

Hoping to catch Jesus off guard...they call him "Teacher" and one who always tells the truth about God's will for mankind. Then they ask the question, 'Is it OK for us pay taxes to the Romans?' Jesus sees through their false praise and calls them hypocrites. He asks them to show him the coin they use to pay taxes.

Jesus now does what he often does...he answers a question with a question. "Tell me", he asks the Pharisees, "Whose face and name are on the coin?" "The Emperor's," they answered. "Well, then, pay the Emperor what belongs to him and pay God what belongs to

him." They all went away shaking their heads.

Here's an interesting historical fact. In 1907 President Theodore Roosevelt had the phrase "In God We Trust" removed from newly minted \$20 gold pieces. He thought having God's name on coins was sacrilegious. The public couldn't have disagreed more and the phrase quickly reappeared. \$20 gold pieces without the motto are now valuable collectors items.

The Pharisees in today's Gospel thought they were being clever in trying to trap Jesus into giving a simple "yes" or "no" answer to their question about paying taxes. If Jesus answered "yes"...they could charge him with blasphemy. If he said "no"...they could run off to the Roman tax police and have him arrested for treason.

The Gospel is not about paying taxes although if we are looking for Jesus to give us a definitive answer whether we are supposed to pay taxes or not...we have his answer..."yes"!

Paying taxes doesn't offend God...quite the opposite! He expects us to pay our taxes because it's the right thing to do...and helps support programs that provide relief to those who are less fortunate. Also, Jesus doesn't want us to break the law and risk incurring the wrath of the IRS or Franchise Tax Board.

Ultimately...the Gospel is about putting God first in our lives...and giving our love...our trust...and to the best of our ability our money to support his Church on Earth. And while our contributions to the Parish might be deductible from what we end up owing Uncle Sam on Tax Day...our money belongs to God anyway...we should give it gladly and freely.

"In God We Trust" is a good motto for us to live by. It doesn't make our coins or currency any more spendable. It should remind us of the message in today's Gospel.

Give to God first what is rightfully his...pay our taxes and other obligations...and the rest will take care of itself.

