

TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY-CYCLE A

Today's Gospel begins with a familiar scene. And, I would like for all of us to see parallels to our present day.

Influential members of the Jewish society, the disciples of the Pharisees, and some Herodians (devotes of King Herod) are trying to trip Jesus up with a trick question: "Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?" Remember that the coinage used in such tax payment contained an image of Caesar with the words, "Tiberius Caesar, majestic son of the majestic god and high priest." It effectively proclaimed Caesar was a god. This was blasphemy. Ok, back to the story.

On the surface, our Lord was in a bind. If He answers 'yes', He may appear to be sanctioning paganistic practices. If He answers 'no', He might be used as a revolutionary.

One parallel, many of us face similar challenges and tensions as we wonder, "Can I be a faithful Catholic and good citizen at the same time? Can I support a government which approves legalized abortion or favor embryonic stem cell research or favor a smorgasbord of other "issues" that are in direct conflict with the teachings of Jesus and His Church?"

Jesus' answer was brilliant: "repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar AND to God what belongs to God." He had to throw in that annoying little word "AND," didn't He? His answer gives us guidance on how we can live in an increasingly secular world while still remaining faithful to Christ and His eternal truths.

Let's start with the second half of the answer He gave...with what we are to repay or render to God. Common sense and natural law tells us that every person is created in His image and likeness. This means that every person is a child of God and is worthy of respect, and that ALL human life is therefore sacred. Next, we are to make our faith in God, our obedience to His laws and truths and our living by Gospel values, the # 1 defining feature of our lives. From this fundamental belief, flows all actions toward our neighbor.

"Repaying Caesar what belongs to Caesar" reminds us that, while our allegiance is to heaven, where we live our earthly lives is also important. The Church recognizes that much good can come from our governments and their officials. Thus, we are called to obey all *just* laws and fulfill our duties and responsibilities, such as voting and paying taxes.

With regard to those laws and practices that are *unjust or immoral*; that contradict God's laws; that deny the sanctity of all human life and strip people of dignity, we are called to work within our government to bring about conversion.

So, what does our Lord teach us today? While we give worldly obligations their due, our highest commitment is to Jesus Christ, His truth and His teaching! Our ears must be attuned to His voice among us, His Church. We are to raise people's thinking and lift up our own actions to make the ways of Jesus ever more present in our world. We are, to be quite blunt, called to make a difference. Not for earthly values but for God's!