

## Rendering to God

29<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

Ave Maria Catholic Church. October 22, 2023. Fr. David M Vidal

What a great introduction to Jesus's teaching. Even though they were hypocrites, the Pharisees said: *“Teacher, we know that you are a truthful man, and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.”*

Their words introduce Jesus’s actions and words. He teaches the way of God in accordance with the truth. Jesus’s thinking is not like man’s thinking. The Pharisees were hoping to trap Jesus within the limits of human respect. Should we pay taxes to Caesar, or should we not? Then, Jesus asked for a coin, and a simple coin became the lesson of their lives.

Jesus said: *“Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.”* In his answer, Jesus shows that our lives have both, a temporal and an eternal dimension. We live in the world, and, at the same time, our lives go beyond this world. We have temporal responsibilities that we must fulfill without forgetting that our lives have an eternal dimension.

Let us start by considering the eternal dimension of our lives. What should we give to God?

In the gospel of this Sunday’s liturgy, we hear that we must *“Give to God what belongs to God.”* We can ask, what does belong to God? Perhaps it would be better to ask: What does not belong to Him?

In the book of Deuteronomy (10:14), Moses exhorts the Israelites by saying: *“Think! The heavens, even the highest heavens, belong to the Lord, your God, as well as the earth and everything on it.”*

Psalm 89:12 praises God with these words: *“Yours are the heavens, yours the earth; you founded the world and everything in it.”*

The apostle John writes in his first letter: *“You belong to God, children . . .”* (1 John 4:4). It is not just the world and everything that is around us, it is not just the heavens and even the highest heavens, but we also belong to God, we are his children. We belong to Him.

In 2008, Pope Benedict XVI explained today’s gospel message in one of his general audiences, and he said: *“If the image of Caesar was stamped on Roman coins which for this reason were to be rendered to him, the human heart bears the imprint of the Creator, the one Lord of our life,”* (General Audience, Wed.17, Sept. 2008).

The human heart bears the imprint of the Creator. We cannot erase that mark without destroying ourselves in the process. We are his creatures. We belong to God.

But that is not all, our souls bear the imprint of the Redeemer since in baptism, we were sealed with the indelible mark of Christ, and that mark was ratified with the sacrament of confirmation. We have been purchased by Jesus's blood. We belong to Christ!

If we belong to God, if we belong to Christ, what shall we give to our Lord and God?

Perhaps St Ignatius of Loyola gave one of the best answers to this question when he wrote this prayer in his book of *the Spiritual Exercises*. The prayer says:

*Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will. All I have and call my own. You have given all to me, to you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace, that is enough for me.*

What a beautiful prayer! “*Everything is yours, what I am, what I have, do with it what you will.*” This is a challenging prayer. Praying in this way is not easy. It requires a constant search for God. It requires the desire to listen to his word and be guided by the light of faith.

After we truly grasp that we belong to God and we pray our prayer of love and self-giving to our Creator and Redeemer, is anything else expected from us? Yes, it is. The acceptance of our eternal dimension must necessarily have an impact on our daily actions.

If we truly embrace Jesus's life and message, we cannot but be committed to Jesus's mission. Jesus's life and message are not a secret that we must keep for our own personal benefit, emotional fulfillment, and spiritual gain. Love makes equals, not only in mind and heart but also in actions.

If we belong to Christ in such a way that we are transformed by his image imprinted in us, we must also work to communicate that image of Christ to others and give others the opportunity to be transformed as well.

Of course, our relationship with Christ is personal, however, it is never private. The call to congregate “in community” and celebrate the Day of the Lord is a precept of the Church, (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2180-82). Then, at the end of Mass, we are sent out to the world to be witnesses to Christ before others. The call to evangelize, make disciples, and baptize is at the foundation of our faith, (Mt 28:19).

For many, God is hidden. For many, God is unknown. For many, God is absent. However, God manifests Himself to us. We know Him and embrace Him by faith, and He remains present in our lives. We bear His mark. We belong to Him! And if we belong to Him, that brings consequences.

Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, in his book, *Render Unto Caesar* (2009), makes this important point:

*“We Christians are in the world but not of the world. We belong to God, and our home is heaven. But we are here for a reason: to change the world . . . in the name of Jesus Christ. The work belongs to us. Nobody will do it for us. And the idea that we can accomplish it without engaging in a hands-on way the laws, the structures, the public policies, the habits of mind, and the root causes that sustain injustice in our country is a delusion.”*

Our belonging to Christ is not a theory but a way of living. Our belonging to Christ is a joy that cannot be hidden. Our belonging to Christ in the Catholic Church is a gift, and, at the same time, a responsibility.

Much was given to us, and much we must produce as fruits of faith, in our families, in our town, in our parish, and in our society. Let us start by deepening our personal relationship with Christ and then, let us share that image with others. Amen.