

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

GOSPEL

+ Matthew 22, 15-21

The Pharisees got together and planned how they could trick Jesus into saying something wrong. They sent some of their followers and some of Herod's followers to say to him, "Teacher, we know that you are honest. You teach the truth about what God wants people to do. And you treat everyone with the same respect, no matter who they are. Tell us what you think! Should we pay taxes to the Emperor or not?"

Jesus knew their evil thoughts and said, "Why are you trying to test me? You show-offs! Let me see one of the coins used for paying taxes." They brought him a silver coin, and he asked, "Whose picture and name are on it?"

"The Emperor's," they answered.

Then Jesus told them, "Give the Emperor what belongs to him and give God what belongs to God."

Word of God.

HOMILY

October 19, 2014

THE POOR ARE GOD'S

Behind Jesus' back, the Pharisees reach an agreement to prepare a decisive trap for him. They themselves won't come to meet with him. They send some of their disciples, along with some party members of Herod Antipas. Perhaps some powerful Roman tax-collectors will be among them.

The trap is well thought out: "Is it permissible to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" If he answers negatively, they will be able to accuse him of rebellion against Rome. If he justifies the payment of tribute, he will end up discredited by those poor farmers who are oppressed by those taxes, and by those he loves and defends with his whole might.

Jesus' answer has been summarized in a concise manner throughout the centuries in these terms: "Give unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's". Few of Jesus' words have been cited as much as these. And none, perhaps, more distorted and manipulated by interests very far from those of the Prophet, the defender of the poor.

Jesus isn't thinking of God and of Rome's Caesar as two powers that can demand, one from another in their respective spheres, their rights to their subjects. Like any faithful Jew, Jesus knows that to God "belongs the earth and all that is contains, the world and all its inhabitants" (Ps. 24). What could be of Caesar that isn't of God? Aren't the subjects of the emperor, sons and daughters of God"

Jesus doesn't bother about the different positions that the Herodians, the Sadducees or the Pharisees confronted in that society concerning the tributes to Rome and their significance: if they are carrying "the money of the tax" in their pockets, then they should fulfill those obligations. But he doesn't live in service to the Roman Empire, but opens paths to God's Reign and God's justice.

That's why he reminds them about something that no one has questioned him about: "Give to God what belongs to God". That's to say, give to no Caesar what is only of God: the life of God's sons and daughters. As he has repeated over and over to his followers: the poor are God's, the little ones are special to God, God's Reign belongs to them. No one should abuse them.

We must not sacrifice people's life, dignity or happiness to any power. And surely today no power sacrifices more lives and causes more suffering, hunger and destruction than that "tyranny of an economy without face and without truly human objective" that, according to Pope Francis, the powerful of the earth have succeeded in imposing. We can't remain passive and indifferent, stifling the voice of our consciences in the practice of religion.

José Antonio Pagola

HOMILY

October 16, 2011

A CRISIS FOR OUR TIMES

The question that some Pharisees put to Jesus, in collaboration with the Herodians, was evidently aimed to trap him: "Is it permissible to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

If he said that it was licit, Jesus would be discredited before the people who would turn against him, and become easy prey for the Pharisees. If he said that it was not licit, he could be accused of being an agitator of the people against the Romans – who had flocked to the streets of Jerusalem for the Easter celebrations. Any such provocation could result in a rebellion against Caesar.

Without getting into any argument, Jesus just asked them, "Let me see the money you pay the tax with." And he added, "Whose head is this, whose name?" They replied: "Caesar's Tiberius, son of the divine Augustus." Jesus, with that simple question, left them speechless.

Jesus, then, drew his own conclusion: if that image belongs to Caesar, "Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar." Return the coin to Caesar, as a symbol of his political power. You have been using the coins as barter in all your business transactions. Just follow those rules.

Jesus, however, is not subject to the Emperor of Rome, rather "seeking the kingdom of God and his justice", and so he adds something that nobody had asked him: "Very well, give back to God what belongs to God." That coin had the image of Tiberius, but every human

being bears the “image” of God and so belongs to Him. Never sacrifice humans to any power. On the contrary, protect them.

The financial crisis the Western countries are experiencing today cannot be solved easily. More than an economic crisis is a human crisis. Obsessed as we are by an ever increasing welfare system of comfort and consumerism, we have reached a life style which is economically unsustainable.

Solving the crisis will not be possible by purely technical solutions. We will need to change altogether our lifestyle and transform our own consciences: go from the logic of competition to real cooperation, and put real limits to the voracity of markets and learn the new ethics of renunciation.

The crisis is here to stay for a long time. There are difficult years ahead. The followers of Jesus must find in the Gospel the inspiration and strength to make the solidarity possible. Jesus keeps inviting us to stay close to the more vulnerable victims: those who end up always being unjustly sacrificed as victims of every financial strategy.

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