

## **HOMILY FOR October 17-18 TH MASS – Homily – Final**

In today's gospel, we see the Pharisees and the Herodians joining forces and forming an alliance for the sole purpose of getting rid of their common adversary in Jesus. The irony of this alliance is that they want to test Jesus to prove that the eternal truths he has been teaching about the Kingdom of God are irrelevant to urgent issues at that time, such as paying taxes to the Roman Emperor. What makes this alliance suspicious from the get-go is that the Pharisees and Herodians did not have the same opinion on paying the census tax. The Pharisees were religious purists and saw the Roman occupation of their land as an extension of pagan authority in their life and culture and opposed the tax. For them, God was the only king and paying any tax or tribute to an earthly king was an insult to God. The Herodians were political supporters of Herod who ruled Israel with the support of the Rome Emperor and approved the tax. Given their opposing views, they could neither be friends nor allies. Teaming up together they question Jesus on whether fulfilling the civil obligation of paying the census tax to the Roman Emperor is lawful or not.

The question of paying the census tax seemed to be the perfect strategy to trap Jesus. If Jesus supported the tax, he risked losing His standing with those Jewish people who considered Him to be the long-awaited Messiah. If He rejected the tax, he risked being reported as initiating a tax revolt. Any revolt was put down with brutal force by the Romans. Knowing the true issue at hand, Jesus acknowledges

since the Roman coin bears Caesars image it belongs to him and should be given back to him. However, Jesus' response goes beyond their question. By also stating render to God what belongs to God, He reminds them and us that all human beings bear the image of God and our highest obligation should be to give ourselves to Him.

Today's gospel highlights the dual obligations we have towards civil authorities and towards God, and the priorities we should keep in mind when fulfilling them. Fortunately, both obligations are not mutually exclusive. Where civil laws uphold the sanctity of life, dignity of the human person and guarantees justice, equality, and freedom for all its citizens, both, civil and spiritual obligations can be lawfully met. Under such circumstances, fulfilling one's obligations toward civil authorities, does not compromise our duties towards God. Nor does our obligation toward serving God compromise our duties towards civil authorities. There may be times when civil authorities fail to uphold the sanctity of life, the dignity of a human person, and the common good of all its citizens. Under those circumstances, fulfilling civil obligations should be within the broader framework of obedience to God.

Sisters and Brothers, in today's gospel Jesus did not give us a set of guidelines or a check list in discharging our duties, but the core principle that should guide our actions. Created in the image and likeness of God, we rightfully belong to God and owe our existence to Him. Through our baptism and confirmation, we have the

indelible mark of Christ who has redeemed us with His precious blood. To give to God what is God's is to give oneself entirely to Him and putting God's will and ways before one's own. But to do so requires formation of a good conscience in accord with human reason and the teachings of the church. A good conscience helps one to pursue the good and be faithful to the truth to the best of their knowledge even if others see it as wrong. Failure to form a good conscience can lead to making flawed moral judgements. As Catholic Christians let us strive to form our conscience through prayer, studying scripture, teachings of the church and applying them to human reason to human reason to assist in discerning as to how, within the overall claim of God we can discharge our civil duties and give to God what is God's.