Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time A - Our Life is God's Life, And God's Life is Ours
October 18, 2026

In today's gospel reading (Matthew 22:15-21) Jesus is confronted by the Pharisees, concerned with keeping Torah faith despite the ongoing Roman occupation. And there are also gathered some Herodians, those who support the ruling family of Palestine, and therefore are seen by others to collaborate with the Roman Empire. It might seem odd that these two groups are together but they have a common cause to derail the Jesus Movement. Together, they set about to test Jesus in public. They think they have a foolproof plan to discredit him, bringing forth a question to trap him: about paying the tribute tax to Caesar. If he says Jews ought *not* pay the tax, some will agree with his sticking to Torah ideals, while others will question his sense of what is practical for survival in the Empire. (This was likely the position of the Pharisees.) On the other hand, were he to say "Yes" to paying the tax, such a practical answer will cost him both politically and religiously, possibly to the point of losing the support of his own followers. It seems a foolproof trap they have laid for him. What could go wrong with their plan? Plenty as it turns out!

All Jesus has to say is, "Show me the coin used for the tax." Gleefully, his opponents produce a denarius—which shows an image of the emperor on one side, and an inscription on the reverse. Now this coin, for the Jewish people, is itself a forbidden idol. Such coins were not permitted to be used for offerings at the Temple—thus the reason for the money-changers and currency exchanges in the Temple courtyard. That the Pharisees and Herodians would produce such a coin on the Temple Mount exposes them as hypocrites. Simply by producing the coin, they expose themselves as breaking the rules of the very system they seem to be protecting with their questions! Jesus could stop there, but no. After getting *them* to say whose image appears on the coin, he replies, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperors, and to God the things that are God's." Like any respectable rabbi, Jesus turns their question back on them: Knowing what you should know, *you decide* about the tax. The real question is not about taxes. It's about who you serve. Jesus does not suggest that the religious realm and the political realm deserve equal respect when he said, "Give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." Instead, the second clause all but cancels out the first. The realm of Caesar is vastly inferior to the significance of God's realm, and in setting them in opposition like this, Jesus underscores that fact and ridicules the original question. Jesus is saying in effect, 'We bear God's image. We belong to God as surely as your coin belongs to Caesar. Who do you actually serve? 'Essentially Jesus challenges them to take their responsibility to God as seriously as their obligations to the state. After all, God said it loud and clear in the First Reading (Isaiah 45: 1, 4-6): "…there is no one besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other."

The gospel reminds us that we are members of God's kingdom and citizens of the country in which we live, with obligations to both. Tensions can exist between our loyalty to God and our duty to our country especially when political questions touch upon faith and morality. Religion and politics do mix and overlap, so crucial issues of conscience occasionally emerge. In these instances, we must put God and his laws first even if it brings us into conflict with the state which is given to us by God. We are obliged to bring the gospel of Jesus into every aspect of our life. Serving God is our utmost priority, especially when it runs into conflict with the state. A good example is St. Thomas More who as the King's Chancellor, refused to support King Henry VIII in his attempt to annul the Queen, Catherine of Aragon, in order to marry Anne Boleyn, the lady-in-waiting. The king, in his rage, striped Thomas More all his property, all his privileges and sent him to his execution. In his final statement on the scaffold before his execution in 1535, Thomas More said: "I die the king's good servant, and God's first."

We are chosen to be the saving hands of Christ and are called to spread the good news in different ways, on many levels. Living in an imperfect world highlights the need for Christian men and women in public life who are not afraid to express their allegiances to God in social and religious affairs. Their fresh vision points out spiritual values which others would fail to take into account. The most important goal for all of us is to work out our salvation. It takes a lifelong effort to give to God what is his due. By remaining steadfast in our faith, at home and in public life, we show that our reward is not to be sought in this world. Paul, like Jesus, has one chief concern when he writes to the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 1: 1-5ab): Give to God what is God's. Their teaching echoes down to us with a strong imperative. This is no time for idle chat. No time for idlers. No time for returning to the worship of idols. There's no time to worry about Caesar nor Herod. It's time to continue the work of faith, the labor of love, and the steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. As St. Paul said, "For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God that he has chosen you, because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction."

This Sunday coincides with the 100th anniversary of World Mission Sunday, Pope Leo reminds the Church to continue the work of bringing the Gospel to those who do not yet know Christ. Let's echo the psalm (96): "Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous works among all the peoples. For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised…ascribe to the Lord glory and strength…" We are all missionaries whether we are in our own home or travel to the ends of the world, we must carry on with our missionary work to say among the nations "The Lord is King!", we must work as if the preservation of the world depends on what we are all doing in this small, otherwise insignificant space we call our life. Because it does matter. Our life is God's life. And God's Life is ours.