



# WEEKLY GOSPEL REFLECTION



## 29<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, CYCLE A

Fr. David Rosenberg

visit us at <http://HopeCrossingMinistries.com/>

"...render therefore to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God." Matt 21:22

Before this story of "Caesar's Coin" can be fully appreciated, what must be understood is that paying taxes to Caesar was seen as an act of idolatry to the Pharisees. It implied that there was a god ruling Israel other than God – a false god that claimed divinity for himself. But here lies the trap, Saying, "No, you should not pay the tax," meant Jesus could have been charged with sedition, as, indeed, he was later charged, though unjustly. With a simple "yes," he would have seemed to acknowledge a false god that the Pharisees rejected.

The response Jesus does give recognizes that all creation has its place but it must not lay claim to that which rightfully belongs to God. In other words, the power of the state is limited and does not supplant God. As a matter of fact, as in the first reading, the implication is that a ruler (in this case, Caesar) has no power except that which is given him from God, and Jesus Christ is the Pantocrator, the One who holds the whole realm of created reality in His omnipotent hand, the One who, out of His love for the Father, does not disdain even the tiniest token of worldly life, the one who, in fact, justifies all worldly life, even the token with the image of Caesar's image on it.

To drive this point home, Jesus takes the coin into his hand with a subtle appreciation for all creation, and for this coin's humble part in what Saint Benedict calls the "Work of God" -- "Opus Dei." In St John's Gospel, Our Lord reveals an astounding truth to the Pharisees after the healing of the man who had been crippled for 38 years: "My Father is always at his work, as am I." (Jn 5:17). These words inform us that God's work is not over; even though the creation of the universe was complete, creation is ongoing. Consider the image of Caesar on this coin as an icon of worldly creation. Jesus Christ takes this icon, and, within the Jewish Orthodox faith, essentially presents it as a "barakah," a blessing offered to the Father. "Blessed are you, Lord of all creation, for through your goodness you gave us the minerals of the earth, and creative works of human hands, crafted into this icon of human endeavor. I humble offer this gift to you. Blessed be God forever!" In this moment, Jesus works to illuminate the hearts of those present. Jesus sole purpose is to ignite a spark of new life to further the creation of the new man of which St Paul speaks: "And put on the new man, who according to God is created in justice and holiness of truth" (Eph 4:24). Even so, they reject the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God. "They left him and went away." By turning away they refuse to embrace in Jesus the Father's eternal image. In this negative action, the Pharisees are refusing to give back to God what belongs to God, His image standing before them (Imago Dei.) There is a spirit in all humans that yearn for His light. All Jesus asked in return was for them to offer back in oblation the essence of their lives, that He first gave to them.

Let us reflect this week on this powerful lesson. May we open our hearts to Christ's healing sacrifice of repentance and contrition. May we never turn from Him, as the Pharisees did. May we seek no consolation except the light of His face and the forgiveness of His touch. May we always return love to Him, as He loves us. May we take delight only in His Sacred Heart, for He grants every desire of the heart!

**A Reading from the Holy Gospel According to Matthew**

The Pharisees went off  
and plotted how they might entrap Jesus in speech.  
They sent their disciples to him, with the Herodians, saying,  
"Teacher, we know that you are a truthful man  
and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.  
And you are not concerned with anyone's opinion,  
for you do not regard a person's status.  
Tell us, then, what is your opinion:  
Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?"  
Knowing their malice, Jesus said,  
"Why are you testing me, you hypocrites?  
Show me the coin that pays the census tax."  
Then they handed him the Roman coin.  
He said to them, "Whose image is this and whose inscription?"  
They replied, "Caesar's."  
At that he said to them,  
"Then render therefore to Caesar what belongs to Caesar  
and to God what belongs to God."

***The Gospel of the Lord***

