

Meditations: Sunday of the Twenty-Ninth Week of Ordinary Time (Year A)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the twenty-ninth week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: a question with no right answer; what belongs to Caesar; what belongs to God.

10/22/2023

- A question with no right answer
- What belongs to Caesar
- What belongs to God

THE LEADERS of the people of Israel have been trying to catch Jesus in an error or verbal inconsistency for several days. They pose what they think is a radical question, requiring Him to take a side: *Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?* (Mt 22:17).

We should remember that the Jewish people were uncomfortable in the Roman empire for political as well as religious reasons: the worship paid to the emperor was an affront to the God of Israel. The question they ask Jesus seems to have no right answer. If He said it was lawful, his people would consider Him a traitor; if He said it was not, they could accuse Him of rebelling against the Roman authorities.

Jesus's answer places Him above the controversy: *Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's*

(Mt 22:21). First He reminds them of all citizens' responsibilities toward the state: the image on the coin is Caesar's, and the tribute must be paid. But immediately after this, He reminds them of man's responsibility before God, whose image is stamped on our hearts and souls. The dilemma the leaders of Israel want Him to resolve is rooted in a faulty assumption.

St. Josemaria frequently reminded us that "there is no clash, no opposition, between serving God and serving men; between the exercise of our civic rights and duties and our religious ones; between the commitment to build up and improve the earthly city, and the conviction that we are passing through this world on our way to our heavenly homeland."^[1] It is just the opposite: with order, the two spheres of our lives nourish and strengthen each other. Giving glory to God leads

us to care for the world He made and gave us as an inheritance, and working with our peers to build a more just world is a way to collaborate in God's work.

RENDER THEREFORE to Caesar the things that are Caesar's (Mt 22:21). St. Josemaria liked to tell us that when we work, Christians have our feet on the ground and our heads in heaven. He told his children: "Have no doubt: any kind of evasion of the honest realities of daily life is for you, men and women of the world, something opposed to the will of God."^[2] We find our path to holiness in our social duties and obligations. We are called to make the world a better place through our work and to bring Christ's light to all earthly environments and professions.

All things are yours, you are Christ's, and Christ is God's (1 Cor 3:22-23), says St. Paul. The Prelate of Opus Dei wrote: "In the face of this reality – *all things are yours* – we rejoice in the joys of others; we enjoy all the good things that surround us, and we get involved in the challenges of our time."^[3] Many people around us are suffering and in need because of war and poverty in different parts of the world. St. Paul's words are an invitation to make the world's challenges our own, starting with those closest to us: family difficulties, conflicts at work, the fatigue of encouraging others in a slow-moving project, or other painful situations we have to face.

All of us can help solve the problems of our time. Through the communion of the saints, we can be confident that our prayer and sacramental life really alleviate the suffering around us. And our talents enable us to

improve the lives of the people around us through our actions. "In the midst of crises and tempests, the Lord calls to us and invites us to reawaken and activate this solidarity capable of giving solidity, support and meaning to these hours in which everything seems to be wrecked. May the creativity of the Holy Spirit encourage us to generate new forms of familiar hospitality, fruitful fraternity and universal solidarity."^[4] —

RENDER TO God the things that are God's (Mt 22:21). After affirming that it is lawful to pay tribute to Caesar, Jesus highlights a much deeper truth: we belong to God. The relationships we form in society are important, and they influence our joys and concerns and become part of our character. But Jesus reminds us that we are created in the divine image.

"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. Genuine secularism does not mean, therefore, leaving the spiritual dimension out of consideration but rather recognizing that it is precisely this that radically guarantees our freedom and autonomy from earthly realities, thanks to the dictates of creative Wisdom which the human conscience is capable of accepting and actuating."^[5] —

God has given us everything. That is why "we can and must live our life in recognition of this fundamental belonging and in heartfelt gratitude toward our Father, who creates each one of us individually, unrepeatable, but always according to the image of his beloved Son, Jesus."^[6] — Knowing that we are dependent on God does not diminish our humanity or

weaken our relationships. Rather, it helps us understand our identity as beloved children, appreciate our value, and see ourselves as brothers and sisters. When we work to improve our world, we are restoring what belongs to God to Him. Thus we will always be able to face the future with hope and respond to challenges with courage. We can ask the Virgin Mary, with God's help, to make the world a better place, just as she did in her home and in Nazareth.

^[1] St. Josemaria, *Friends of God*, no. 165.

^[2] St. Josemaria, *Passionately Loving the World*.

^[3] Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral letter, 19-III-2022, no. 7.

^[4] Pope Francis, Audience, 2-IX-2020.

^[5] Pope Benedict XVI, Audience, 17-IX-2008.

^[6] Pope Francis, Angelus, 22-X-2017.

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