



Bible Study * Twenty-Eight Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A

**St. Maria Goretti and
St. Peter Claver
Parishes**

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They replied, "Caesar's."* At that he said to them, "Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God." Matt. 21:22 (NABRE)

Reading I: Isaiah 45:1, 4-6

GIVE GOD WHAT IS HIS! God has bestowed many gifts on each of us. Some gifts we perceive and use. Others we have not yet discovered, while others we perceive and refuse to use. Since these are all gifts from God for our earthly use, we are required to use our gifts for His honor and glory. After all, they belong to Him.

On the other hand, God sometimes uses the gifts that He has given to us without our knowledge. Only God knows the endless possibilities that lie concealed in each one of us! Should we not give ourselves away to God, so He can use us? Should we not give God what is His. St. Augustine of Hippo, the celebrated North African theologian, called giving God what is His, "Doing Justice to God". Doing Justice to God means returning to God the creativity, care,



**Cyrus the Great
Trapped in Politics –
Freed By God!**

mercy and love that He has freely given to us.

In the first reading, Cyrus the Great Persian King gave God what was His. He liberated the Israelites, the Chosen People of God. The People of God had been enslaved by the powerful Babylonians who faded like grass before the unshakeable power of God, through the conquests of Cyrus (vv. 2-3).

Isaiah declares that it was by God's hand that Cyrus crushed the Babylonians and freed Israel (vv. 1-4). God called upon Cyrus, a non-believer, and gave him the title, "anointed one," so that God's people could return to Jerusalem. The liberation of Israel shows that God is faithful to His People. He will use hidden means to protect and secure their redemption. This liberation is a second Exodus. In the first Exodus, God went before Israel in a cloud, or a pillar of fire. Now, all nations would see the glory of God (v. 6). Cyrus the Great gave God what was His. He used his talents and gifts for God's purpose, even though he did not know God. If a non-believer can give God what is His, can we Christians not do the same? **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** Has God given you a gift or a talent that you do not use? What is it?

WHO WERE THE HERODIANS?

HERODIANS [heh ROW dih uns] — Were Jews of influence and standing who were favorable toward Greek customs and Roman law in New Testament times. Although the Herodians should not be equated with the Sadducees, they sided with the Sadducees in their pro-Roman sympathies and opposed the Pharisees, who were anti-Roman. The Herodians joined forces with the Pharisees, however, in their opposition to Jesus.

In Galilee, the Herodians and the Pharisees plotted against Jesus' life (Mark 3:6). At Jerusalem, the Herodians and the Pharisees again joined forces, seeking to trap Jesus on the issue of paying tribute to Caesar (Matt 22:16; Mark 12:13). Jesus warned his disciples, "Take heed, beware of the leaven [evil influence] of the Pharisees and... of Herod" (Mark 8:15). (From Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright © 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers)

Reading II: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5b

GIVE GOD WHAT IS HIS! St. Paul reminds the Thessalonians to give God what is His. He reminds them that they were chosen by God to receive the Gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit with full conversion (v. 6).

This letter of St. Paul to the Thessalonians is considered to be the oldest document of Christianity. Thessalonica was in Southern Greece where St. Paul converted some Jews and many Gentiles in the summer of 50 A.D. From there he went to Corinth where in 51 A. D, he wrote this letter (Acts. 17:1-10). He is writing to the Church in Thessalonica, not to an individual. The word church in Greek EKKLESIA, means assembly. In the Old Testament the word means religious assembly. Therefore, from the beginning, Christians met each week to celebrate the Eucharist – the "breaking of the bread." (Acts 2:42, 2:42, 20:7; 1 Cor. 10:16). St. Paul recognizes the "theological virtues" of faith, hope and love which marked the Thessalonian church. By serving each other, they gave God what was His – themselves. **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** What do you give to God?

Gospel: Matthew 22:15-21

Give God What Is His! As citizens of a materialistic society, we sometimes get the impression that everything we acquire is ours. Yet, we know that God is the Creator of all things. We owe God our very existence. Sometimes our relationship with God places us in conflict with civil authority. A conscientious objection to war, police brutality, policy decisions on poverty, immigration and the environment are a few examples of such conflicts. When these conflicts arise, do we decide to serve God, or do we serve the civil authorities? The answer is to give God what is His.

The Gospel presents a conflict between civil and religious authority. This dialogue between Jesus, the Herodians and the Pharisees concerns the issue of taxes that was a serious issue during the first-century in Palestine. The purpose of the dialogue was to trap Jesus in the politics of the day with a question that had both theological and political repercussions.

The Pharisees, which means separate ones, were religious patriots who bitterly opposed Roman rule. The Herodians were supporters of the Herodian Dynasty and collaborators with Roman authority. These two unlikely allies combined to trap Jesus to either offend the Roman rulers, or blaspheme against Yahweh. Their approach was marked by flattery.

First, they call Him teacher and a truthful man who teaches the way of God (vv. 15-16). Then they sprung the trap: *Is it lawful to pay the census tax?* The census tax was a requirement of Rome and was to be paid with Roman coins that bore the image of Tiberius Caesar, Roman emperor from AD 12-37. It contained an inscription that called him "son of the divine Augustus". On the other side of the coin declared him, "high priest."

Jesus recognized the deception and asked them to show Him a coin. He literally asked them to demonstrate their hypocrisy. By producing the coin with Caesar's image on it, the Pharisees showed that while they opposed taxation, they paid it just like every other Palestinian Jew to avoid repression by Rome (vv. 19-20). The reply to pay to Caesar what is his and to God what is His highlights the malice and falsity of his interrogators. In His reply, Jesus diminishes the claims of Caesar. But what is it that belongs to God? We do. We are made in His image and so was Caesar Augustus. Our highest responsibility in life is to give ourselves back to God. Give God what is His – ourselves!
DISCUSSION QUESTION: How will you give God what is His?

Pray About It!

Monday

Read Matthew 22:13-21. Do you exercise your right to vote?

Tuesday

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5b. Meditate on how you use the talents that God has given you.

Wednesday

Read Isaiah 45:1-6. Pray for the persecuted Christians in African and the Middle East.

Thursday

Pray for the Gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Friday

Attend Mass and receive the Eucharist.

The Catechism Teaches About the Duty of the Catholic Christian Citizen!

2239 It is the duty of citizens to contribute along with the civil authorities to the good of society in a spirit of truth, justice, solidarity, and freedom. The love and service of one's country follow from the duty of gratitude and belong to the order of charity. Submission to legitimate authorities and service of the common good require citizens to fulfill their roles in the life of the political community.

2240 Submission to authority and co-responsibility for the common good make it morally obligatory to pay taxes, to exercise the right to vote, and to defend one's country: Pay to all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.

[Christians] reside in their own nations, but as resident aliens. They participate in all things as citizens and endure all things as foreigners.... They obey the established laws and their way of life surpasses the laws.... So noble is the position to which God has assigned them that they are not allowed to desert it.

Resources: *The Gospel of Matthew* Curtis Mitch and Edward Sri. Baker Academics Grand Rapids, Mi, pp. 284-286; *1 Thessalonians*, Ivan Havener, O.S.B.; Collegeville Bible Commentary, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville Minn., p. 1151-1159; *Living Liturgy Spirituality, Celebration, and Catechesis for Sundays and Solemnities Year A 2017*, Joyce Zimmerman, C. PP. S. Kathleen Harmon, S.ND. de N., Christopher W. Canlon, S. M. Liturgical Press Collegeville, Mn. pp. 230-231; Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New American Bible, revised edition* © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the New American Bible may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner. The Philanthropic Trends Digest 7:13 [June 1, 1990] <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catechism/catechism-of-the-catholic->

This meditation is prepared by Deacon Terrel J. Broussard for personal use in Adult Faith Formation at St. Peter Claver and St. Maria Goretti Parishes in New Orleans, La. ©2014