

## Homily for the 29<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time – Year A

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Which realm do we live in? There seems to be two realms in today's Gospel: God's and Caesar's. "Give to God the things that are God's, and to Caesar, the things that are Caesar's." An interesting detail in the answer that is prompted by the Pharisees question to Jesus, is the question of whose image is on that coin? The image being that of Caesar himself. Could it not be that we ourselves are those of the things that belong to God? Let me explain what I mean.

If we recall the narrative in the Book of Genesis, we are reminded that we are created in the image and likeness of God. We are reminded that we bear God's image. We belong to God. And therefore we are asked to give back to God what belongs to God.

This account in Matthew's Gospel invites us to face, it seems to me, some important questions about the living out of our Christian faith today. Are we simply just Sunday Christians? Giving to God maybe an hour a week at church, and then getting on with our lives. Making money, watching television, going after fancy cars, eating splendid food? Maybe we live our daily lives in fear? Seeing the world as us and them. Or maybe we live our daily lives wishing things had turned out better. Maybe we live our daily lives fighting to hold onto a relationship, or even, struggling to get out of an unhealthy relationship. Somehow our lives, our daily lives, do not belong to the realm of God. We leave it to the so-called 'religious professionals' to belong to God, and we get on with our busy days.

And so we see ourselves, perhaps much more, in the realm of Caesar's world... belonging to Caesar's world. But what happens if we try it the other way around? Perhaps we are so serious about our Christian faith and spirituality that we try not to get involved in our world. We stay away from enjoyment and worry about worldly things. We want to be uncorrupted by this world. Throughout history there are marvellous examples of people who chose to do this: the desert hermits, for example, cloistered monks and nuns, the great mystics. A penny for Caesar some say, and all the rest for God.

But if we push this too far, however, everything of Caesar must go, because it is not of God. And on the other hand, God has to go away because science and secularism and our busy lives are more important.

We can even push this a little bit further. We can spend our days condemning those who we think do not shape up to the Christian ideal. People that we judge and we want to send to hell because of whatever it is that they hold true. Just last week, a fifteen-year old who died in 2006 was beatified in Rome, the Italian, Carlo Acutis, and he died of leukaemia, but interestingly enough, he is known for the way that he chose to use the Internet. His mother said of him, "he was the light-side of the dark-side of the web." Do not many of us spend much time condemning others on social media, telling them of their fate.

Jesus makes this statement to settle the argument that was posed to him by the Pharisees. And perhaps the key to understanding what Jesus really says is asking, "Can God and Caesar co-exist?" It is not one or the other, but both.

I want to invite you this morning to consider three things. The first one is are we not like that coin bearing the image of God? And so meant to be spent for God's purposes in Caesar's world? God wants to spend us where there is poverty, where there is lack of interest or investment. And so can we see ourselves in God's image? And allow ourselves to be spent in God's world.

You know, so often, the image that we hold about ourselves says a lot about the image of God. And the Image of God that we have says a lot about the image of ourselves. Today we are reminded that we are made in the image and likeness of God. What does that mean for you?

But there is more to this, and the second thing I invite you to ponder, is that life has a way of making us crinkly, of soiling us, of maybe even tearing the edges, or getting us dirty, like money gets soiled and dirty and torn. But a coin or a note, despite being passed from hand-to-hand, and getting soiled and dirty, never loses its value. We, made in the image and likeness of God, despite whatever throws at us, never lose our value.

In spite of the voices within, perhaps, that tell us that we are not worth much; in spite of the setbacks of life; in spite of the losses, the flatness, the sin, the broken-relationships, the disillusionment, in spite of all these, we have infinite value, because we bear the image of God.

And today, the Lord invites us, come to the realisation that we have more value than perhaps we ourselves even admit.

And the third and final thing I want to say, is it does not end there either. Because God puts us, he puts you, his money in the world, to be holy, to be friends with the things of Caesar. To work in the world of sin, in the world of frailty, in the world of brokenness, to reveal God's way, and God's love in Caesar's world.

Notice Jesus uses the word 'belong'. Belong not in a possessive way, but in a way that we are felt, loved, and are able to love. We belong, and because we belong, we are asked to give ourselves to God. And that means also to the world that God created.

And so, we are asked to go into Caesar's world, to go into Caesar's palaces, to walk the dirty roads, and show everyone what it really means to be made in the image and likeness of God.

That's what God invites us to do, bring value to a world that often we condemn as valueless.

And so which realm do we live in? Truth be told, we are invited to live fully in both.