



HOMILY HELPER

OCTOBER 2023 | EDITION

TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Written by: Deacon James Carabajal





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In the vast expanse of American culture, there's a glaring emphasis on image, materialism, and the trappings of success. Everywhere we turn, we're met with messages about the latest fashion trends, the newest cars, and the most luxurious lifestyles. This consumer-driven mindset, which has become deeply ingrained in our society, often pushes us to measure our worth and the worth of others based on material acquisitions. But as we chase after these fleeting symbols of success, we must ask ourselves: Is this truly the path to lasting fulfillment? Are we ever genuinely content with what we have, or are we perpetually in pursuit of more, trapped in an endless cycle of desire?

Against this backdrop, the teachings of Jesus offer a refreshing and contrasting perspective. In the Gospel, when confronted with the contentious issue of paying taxes to Caesar, He responds with a profound statement: "Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God." At first glance, this might seem like a simple directive about civic duty. But delve deeper, and it's a call to introspection, urging us to reflect on our priorities and what truly belongs to God. If we accept the foundational belief that God is the creator of all, as depicted in the Book of Genesis, then isn't everything, from the air we breathe to the love we feel, a gift from Him? This perspective shifts our focus from the material to the spiritual, urging us to prioritize the eternal over the ephemeral.

Central to this teaching is the concept of stewardship. Everything we have, from our material possessions to our talents and time, is a gift from God. As stewards of these gifts, we have a responsibility to use them wisely, not just for our benefit but for the greater good. This duty extends to our end-of-life plans. While it's natural to think of our assets in terms of how they can benefit our immediate family, we must also consider how they can benefit our faith community and the broader world. By thoughtfully planning our estates, we have the opportunity to leave a lasting legacy that reflects our values and convictions, ensuring that the resources granted to us by God continue to bear fruit well beyond our lifetime.

Over the centuries, many have misinterpreted Jesus' words, using them to advocate for various causes, from the separation of church and state to the compartmentalization of secular and religious life. However, Jesus' message isn't about creating divisions or advocating for a particular

continue on next page >>>>>

political stance. Instead, it's about recognizing God's overarching dominion in all facets of our lives. The Pharisees and Herodians, in their attempt to ensnare Jesus with a politically charged question, missed this profound truth. They were more concerned with trapping Jesus in a political or religious controversy than understanding His deeper spiritual teachings.

The Gospel narrative also underscores the irony of the Pharisees and Herodians. Despite their outward religious piety, they carried a Roman coin with a graven image into the temple, a clear violation of Jewish law. This act not only highlights their hypocrisy but also serves as a stark reminder of the dangers of losing sight of spiritual values in the face of worldly temptations. In contrast, Jesus, devoid of such a coin, emphasizes His detachment from worldly trappings and His unwavering focus on God's kingdom.

At the heart of Jesus' teachings lies a message about priorities. While we inhabit this world and are bound by its laws and norms, our ultimate allegiance should be to God. This sentiment is echoed in the first reading, where God, speaking through Isaiah, proclaims, "I am the Lord and there is no other." Our obedience to worldly authorities, while necessary, should never eclipse our obedience to God and His eternal commandments.

Jesus further elucidates this with the two paramount commandments: to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. These aren't mere religious tenets but foundational principles for a meaningful life. They beckon us to prioritize relationships over possessions, love over avarice, and eternal truths over fleeting gains.

Navigating our daily lives, we're often tasked with balancing our obligations to the secular world (or "Caesar") with our duties to God. Achieving this equilibrium isn't always straightforward, especially in a society that frequently places material success above spiritual growth. Yet, as Christ's followers, we're summoned to view the world through a distinct lens, one that values love, compassion, and justice over mere wealth and status.

In summation, Jesus' teachings beckon us to lead lives that mirror our deepest convictions. While we exist in this world, we aren't solely of this world. Our true worth isn't gauged by our material assets but by our bond with God and our compassion for our fellow humans. Each day presents a fresh opportunity to prioritize love over greed, empathy over indifference, and eternal principles over transient gains. Let's endeavor to lead lives that genuinely honor God, giving back to Him what is rightfully His.

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