

## **Give to God what is God's**

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October 22, 2017

Lynn Meadows (one of our youth group leaders) has asked me to spend some time with our middle school EYC kids this evening talking about the book of Matthew and specifically the parables that are such an integral part of that gospel. As I was preparing this presentation I realized that over the past several weeks I have not put into context the gospel readings that we have heard.

As always the context of Jesus' teachings are critical to understanding them. Now what got passed by sometime in September is a rather critical event in the story of Jesus. The parables and the challenges from the Pharisees and the Herodians all take place after Palm Sunday and the cleansing of the temple and before his arrest. Jesus has been challenged and has been teaching in the temple itself after he chased all the moneychangers and animal sellers out of the Court of the Gentiles. The situation is coming to a head and in just a day or so he will be arrested, tried and crucified. So this is Tuesday and Wednesday of Holy Week.

So that is the setting for today's confrontation. In many respects this reminds me of one of our modern day news conferences. With enemies on both sides, religious and secular Jesus is asked what can only be called a "gotcha" question. It is gotcha question because like so many asked by media today the answer is guaranteed to offend half the population. If he says not to pay taxes he makes the Herodians, supporters of Herod angry and pleases the zealots who oppose the occupation. If he says to pay, then he is using Roman coinage, which declares that Caesar is a god and is therefore blasphemous, he will be labeled as a collaborator and the religious leaders will be upset.

In classic rabbinical form Jesus answers a question with a question. To this day Jews debate scripture by a series of questions. Jesus did this just a few verses ago when he was asked by what authority did John baptize.

Jesus changes the subject and forces the question what belongs to God or what do we owe God? This is the real essence of the story for Matthew. Harken back to the parable a couple of weeks ago about the vineyard and the wicked tenants who do not give God (the vineyard owner) what God was due.

There is towards the end of the Rite 1 prayer of consecration, a very clear statement that is unfortunately lost in Rite 2. "And here we offer and present unto thee O Lord, our selves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto thee." We are not offering just some of us, but all of our being. We are giving back to God what is his, which is all of us, not just 10%.

“Ascribe to the Lord the honor due his name bring offerings and come into his courts” is the offertory phrase that is in our psalm and we use almost every week. In Advent and Lent when we do not sing a doxology or at the 8:15 service we say, “All things come from thee oh Lord, and of thine own have we given thee.” If God created all things, then all of what we have and what we are is from God and belongs to God.

### **Identity**

Jesus gave us a gift when he told us to give to God the things that are God’s. He reminded us that we belong to God and in God we live and move and have our being. It is there where we find our true identity as persons loved and made by God.

*Br. James Koester SSJE*

As Bishop Dan Edwards writes in today’s insert. “That is taking a flying leap into the abyss of God. That is breathing out, trusting that the air will still be there for us to breathe back in. Jesus invites us to give ourselves to the God of infinitely generous grace trusting that God will give us back ourselves again blessed with more life than we had before. It is an act of trust and love.”

Stewardship you see is more than just money. Money is what the Finance committee worries about and yes it is important. Stewardship is how we care for what God has given us. Stewardship is how we care for what God has entrusted to us. Stewardship is what goes on all year long. Stewardship is about the leap of faith that Bishop Dan describes.

Caring for the widow the orphan the last, the least is part of what we do as a parish family. Think of how many of our ministries revolve around that concept. That is what we have been talking about all of October. Seton is one of our major efforts that does just that. Seton is unique in our area and in all of Virginia. Nobody else does what they do for young people. This morning I have asked Carrie who runs the mentoring program to come and talk to you for a moment about the Seton mission.

Carrie then spoke about the three missions of Seton Youth Shelters. To learn more about Seton visit the website at <http://setonyouthshelters.org>.

I would like to finish with a prayer by St. Ignatius

Take Lord, and receive  
all my liberty, my memory,  
my understanding, and my entire will,  
all that I have and possess.  
You have given all to me.  
To You, O Lord, I return it.  
All is Yours,  
dispose of it wholly  
according to Your will.

Give me Your love and Your grace,  
for this is sufficient for me.

*A Prayer of St. Ignatius*