

# Connecting With the Sunday Readings

## The Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sometimes the words of Jesus give the same feeling that can arise when looking into the night sky, especially on a crystal clear night in the middle of winter. The longer you look, the deeper the darkness. It's like looking into what seems a bottomless hole. Sometimes the words of Jesus seem impenetrable. Some questions are not easily resolved with black and white clarity. The world also has some grey areas to consider.

The scene of this Gospel reading is an entrapment. Jesus was not popular with some Pharisees. They were most likely local religious leaders who believed that Jesus was just a little too critical of their ways. They came to Jesus with a group of people who were close to Herod. They wanted the Romans to hear Jesus incriminate himself by failing to give due allegiance to the Roman emperor. Perhaps they spent many evenings crafting the question that they hoped would destroy the reputation of Jesus, either as a prophet, or as a good Jew. The question was about taxation. And it was about ensnaring Jesus. At the end of the account, it's worth considering the brilliance of Jesus in the way he handled this dangerous situation.

### A Gospel Word for the Home

#### Matthew 22:15-21

Here's how the Gospel reading ends: "...Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." (21) Some might remember an earlier translation that began, "Render to Caesar...." First, there are a variety of quite scholarly opinions of what is meant by these words of Jesus. Some may say since everything really belongs to God, then there's no need to pay taxes to the emperor. On the other hand, Jesus doesn't directly forbid paying taxes to the emperor. Some suggest that Jesus is laying a foundation for the separation of church and state. Probably not, though his saying can be a good discussion starter on this topic. What we can say, however, is that Jesus escaped the trap set by his enemies, and left us with something really deep to think about.

Another response is that Jesus is presenting an everyday issue (like paying taxes) and saying that its moral dimension is far from easy to resolve. We need to think about so many things, discuss them, research them, pray about them, and make the best decisions we can in light of our beliefs and values. It's like what families face when living on a very limited income. Hard choices have to be made. The same is true with our use of time. How to best use one's time is becoming a very large issue for many. There are no easy answers. We just have to do our best, and hope for the rest.

## Parent Survival

Uncertainty can weigh heavily on all of us. We like it when the path is clear and decisions are easily made. But so often, we're in a situation where it's very difficult to decide between two goods, or the lesser of two evils. Sometimes we need to simply trust in our best judgment and move ahead, and know that this is okay.

Jesus did not leave us with a guidebook with specific answers to all of our questions. But God did give us a mind to use in making decisions. Sometimes we have to guess and just trust in God that we've made good choices. Once we've made them, it's often not healthy or beneficial to revisit them. Again, we must continue trusting ourselves, and the God who stays with us no matter what. Jesus really didn't give a clear answer to the Pharisees. He laid down a general principle and left it open for them to figure out the rest. In that sense, he respected even them. Certainly he offers us the same respect as we try to make good decisions for our families and ourselves.

*by David Thomas, PhD, Co-Director, The Bethany Family Institute*

## Car or Meal Talk

Why do we pay taxes? Why do we need a government? Even our children do well to talk about these matters.

## One-Line Prayer

God of Wisdom,  
Help our family to make good decisions  
about what's best for all of us.  
Amen.