

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Oct 19th 2014

What Belongs to God?

The answer given by Jesus to those who questioned him in an attempt to entrap him sounds like a clever way out of a no-win situation. If Jesus says that taxes should be paid, he is a friend of the Romans. If he says that taxes should not be paid, he is a trouble maker. The famous “repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God” then appears as a convenient dodging of the question.

When we apply the phrase to our current world, we see the Caesar part rather clearly: obviously, the coin has Caesar’s image and inscription on it—so it’s his! Therefore: taxes should be paid, governments have a legitimate role in Christian life, etc. But resting in the first part of the phrase may blind us to the question that lies hidden in the second part: What exactly “belongs to God”? What does it mean to “repay to God what belongs to God?”

Today’s psalm supplies an answer: “Give the Lord glory and honor . . . the glory due his name.” What does it mean to give God glory and honor? It means acknowledging all that God has done through Jesus: the creation of all that is, relentlessly pursuing us in Jesus so that we might be in union with him, opening our eyes to his healing power, promising us greater life here and eternal life hereafter. To give God glory and honor is to acknowledge our poverty, our frailty, our “nothingness” before him. And to acknowledge that ALL is gift!

“Caesars” inevitably come and go. Governments and political systems, as necessary as they may be, rise and fall. To give God glory and honor acknowledges that, though Caesar ought to receive his due, One greater than Caesar exists. Do we give to God what belongs to God? Do we give the Lord glory and honor? Do we actively thank and praise God for all that we have received? Do we acknowledge our “nothingness” before him? All this belongs to God!

Rev. Richard Gabuzda