

“Render to God the Things That Are God's”

Matthew 22:15-21

Trinity 23

November 14 – 15, 2009

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

When we are confronted with our sin, we're pretty good at changing the subject. We know well how to deflect attention away to something else so that we can avoid our need for repentance. Think of the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus asked her for a drink and engaged her in conversation. When He spoke of the fact that she had been divorced five times and that she was now living together with a guy she wasn't married to, she got all theological and asked Jesus a question about where the appropriate place is for a person to worship. She used religion as a means of avoiding the truth about herself.

The same thing I think is going on in today's Gospel. The Pharisees don't like how Jesus has exposed their sin and their self-righteousness. It is to them that He spoke the most biting of His condemnations, saying **“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.”** And so rather than repenting of their sin, they try to change the subject to whether or not it's right to pay taxes to an oppressive Roman government. They want to trip Him up and ensnare Him so that they won't have to listen to His Word.

So let us be on guard today against getting sidetracked ourselves. For the main emphasis of Jesus' words is not **“Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's”**-Honor the authorities and pay your taxes (though, of course, that is true). The main thing is this, **“Render unto God the things that are God's.”**

Give to God the things that belong to Him. Well, everything belongs to God, even your very bodies. And so you are to give Him everything. Compare yourself to this command. *Have you given everything to God? Do you manage everything in your life according to God's will and to serve His purposes?* Look into these words and see your reflection. It's not pretty. For the truth is that we have looked after ourselves. We have taken for our own pleasure what belongs to God. Don't try to trick Him with clever sounding justifications. Don't think that you will distract Him with what you think are complicated ethical questions about taxes or birth-control, about divorce or war, about how little or how often a person has to come to church to be a true Christian. He sees into the heart. He knows our plotting ways and shallow excuses. He knows our shameful pride, our reluctant, strings-attached gifts, our self-justifying posturing, our half-truths and deliberate deceptions! *Who do we think we are?* **“Render unto God the things that are God's.”** Measured against this good law, this perfect wisdom, every single one of us stands condemned.

Repent, therefore. The way of sinners is lawyers and loopholes, doublespeak and political schemes. But the way of God is truth and forgiveness. The Way of God is the sword of the Word, which slices open your heart, so that your sin may be taken away, and so that He may fill you with His mercy, with His goodness, with Himself.

For, you see, just as the coin was given to Caesar because it bore His image, so also the thing that bears God's image was offered up to Him. It is written, **“(Jesus) is the image of the invisible God.”** He is the image of God “coined” in our human flesh. So it was that Jesus was offered up to God for our sins on the cross, rendered to the Father as a sweet sacrifice. And there was even an inscription placed over Jesus' head at Calvary by an agent of Caesar himself, **“This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.”** What you could not and would not render, God has rendered unto Himself on your behalf! God the Son, Jesus Christ, gave it all, even His life, unto the Father for you. The Innocent has died for the guilty. You are forgiven. Your debt is paid. To render to God the things that are God's is simply to rely on Christ and believe in Him. It is to point to Christ the crucified and say, **“There is my salvation. He alone is the offering that wins for me everlasting life.”**

And there's more. For our Lord put His own inscription on you, His own Triune name, through your baptism into Christ. On you, whose image is tarnished and corrupted, Jesus stamped the sign of the cross and joined you to Himself. In Jesus the very image of God is restored to your humanity. You are now God's holy coinage, His cherished treasure. His love for you is so great, so embracing, so blind that it encompasses you-not in a generic way, the way that some people love cats or chocolate, but in a deliberate, personal, individual way, as though there were only you, even bothering to take the time to number every hair on your head!

In response to this, the baptized say, **“What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits to me? I will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving and will call on the name of the Lord.”** The only thing we can “give” to God is our thanks and praise for what He has first given to us in Christ, to call upon His name in faith and to look to Him for everything. And Romans 12 reminds us that we also **“render unto God” by serving our neighbor. St. Paul says, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you offer your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”**

We offer our bodies like that because we live in the sure hope of the resurrection of the body. We can sacrifice ourselves and our desires in acts of love because we believe that nothing can take away what we have in Christ. The Epistle reminded us, **“The Lord Jesus Christ will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body.”** By the all-encompassing power of the Lord, these lowly bodies of ours-so fragile and susceptible to all sorts of problems-will undergo a wonderful and mysterious transformation on the Last Day, so that they will be like the glorious body of Jesus after His resurrection. Your bodies will no longer be threatened by all of the troubles and the sin and the death they experience in this world. Rather, you will be immortal in Christ. You will share fully in His Easter victory.

Until then, remember that you are citizens of heaven. You're Americans for this life, but you are royal subjects and heirs of the King of kings for all eternity. Purely out of mercy and love, He rendered it all for you that you may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. Come then and eat the food of heaven. Receive the image of God, the bread of life, the body and blood of your Redeemer, Jesus.

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.