

Homily hint for *World Mission Sunday* October 2017

Human beings can't live alone. They belong to a society; they must maintain contact with others in relationships based upon friendship and collaboration. Hence, it is necessary to organize reciprocal relations and determine the rights and duties of each person. We may ask: Is religion associated in any way with the organization of social and political life? We find the answer to this question in the Gospel of today.

The Pharisees, together with sympathizers of King Herod, approached Jesus and asked him that provocative question: "Is it right for us to pay the Roman tax, or not?" (Mark 12:14; Matthew 22:17; Luke 20:22). The flattery that they used to introduce this question was not sincere. Any answer might be seen as double-edged. If Christ said "No" he would be identifying his mission as another in a series of drawn out political revolutionary movements.

In his reply, Jesus does not answer the original question but he announces what seems to be engagingly vague: "Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God." (Mark 12:17) What does that mean? What must we give back? What part of this tax has been stolen from us? What part doesn't belong to us? If one keeps Caesar's coin in his pocket, it means that one uses it and thus recognizes Roman power. One can't invent religious scruples only when it's time to pay the taxes. For Christians, the first teaching seems quite clear: it's a moral as well as a civil duty to contribute to the common good through the payment of taxes. No reason can justify the wanton destruction or theft of the state's goods.

Whatever the type of society and whatever the political or economic policies of the government, the Christian has to represent an exemplary citizen. Christians possess the right and duty to tender their suggestions, to criticize and even to contest the various options taken, but they cannot act in

such a way as to damage the civil community. However, Jesus doesn't stop at stating our duty to contribute to the common good through the payment of our taxes. He adds something that stands as revolutionary: "Give [back] to God what belongs to God". Give back what? Is there anything that doesn't belong to Him?

Then we must give Him everything, but how? Just as the coin has to be returned to its owner, the emperor, because it bears his image, so we must return to God the creature bearing his image. What is this creature? The first chapter of the Bible states: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them" (Genesis 1: 27). Here then is the creature that cannot fall under the ownership of anybody else but God. Nobody has a right to dominate us, to enslave us, to oppress us: we are sacred and we belong to God. To God alone we render worship, but in other things, we happily acknowledge and serve the secular powers, praying that they will rule wisely and justly.

World Mission Sunday gives us the opportunity to carry out the Lord's exhortation in both ways: We could return to the poorest churches what they should have to pursue the mission of evangelization. In addition, we could show our gratitude to God for the mission that he has entrusted us at the heart of our Christian faith. This mission isn't something added to the Christian faith. On the contrary, it lies at the heart of the faith. All Christians are missionaries of the Gospel and they participate actively to the mission of Christ. Pope Francis calls us to a renewal of missionary outreach and to strive to reach the peripheries that need the light of the Gospel. "We are all invited to walk the streets of the world with our brothers and sisters, proclaiming and witnessing to our faith in Christ and making ourselves heralds of his Gospel." (*World Mission Day*, 2013)

