

“What Belongs to God”

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Matthew 22.15-22
October 22, 2023.
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The Word of God on this Sunday places us in a dilemma, we are forced to choose between the kingdom of God or the kingdom of this world, because "no one can serve two masters, then, or hate one and love the other." another, or will appreciate one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” (Matthew 6:24).

This dilemma arises before the representatives of two influential groups in the religious and political life of Israel: Pharisees and Herodians; and at a time of growing tension between Jesus and the Jewish authorities who refused to believe in him. Matthew uncovers a premeditated plot against Jesus when he says: “Then the Pharisees and Herodians gathered together to find a way to entangle him with his words” (Matthew 22:15). Pharisees and Herodians were groups with opposing interests, but on this occasion they came together with the firm purpose of making Jesus disappear, who with his preaching and his teachings sought to produce a profound change in the heart of man.

At the time of Jesus, the people of Israel were dominated politically and militarily by the Roman Empire and many Jews who had a nationalist spirit sought to end Roman oppression and said that it was wrong to pay taxes to the oppressors, but when they encounter the leadership of Jesus, they come to betray their own nationalist feelings and their desire for independence and freedom. Jesus' preaching so disturbed the Jewish leaders that they preferred to betray their principles, allying themselves with a pagan emperor rather than accept Jesus' messiahship. That is why they accuse him of being unruly and of encouraging a revolution against Rome. If they achieved their goal then the Romans would arrest him and kill him.

The issue of controversy will be whether or not the tax should be paid to the emperor. After much flattery, the Pharisees and Herodians ask him: is it lawful to pay tribute to Caesar, or not? The question has its logic but at the same time it is malicious and tried to lead him to shaky ground. The answer had to be very well analyzed; If he answered no, they turned against the emperor who was seen in the place of a God, and if he answered yes, they turned

against the Jewish people who were fed up with paying taxes. Jesus, discovering the malice involved in the question, tells him, why do you tempt me, you hypocrites? and asking to see a coin, he asks them another question: whose coin is this? From Caesar, they answered. Then he gave them a disconcerting answer: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21).

Since the coin bore the image of Caesar, it belonged to Caesar and had to be given to him, but the human being created in the image of God (Genesis 1: 27) owes himself to his creator. Each person bears the seal of God upon himself. "Therefore, man belongs to God. Our taxes belong to Caesar, yet all of us belong to God. We must surrender our taxes to Caesar, and ourselves to God."

Jesus did not seek to separate the human from the divine, but he requires us to establish differences between his kingdom and the kingdom of this world. Christians, although we are in the world, cannot idolize anything or anyone. We have to live our faith in the midst of the socio-political-economic world with its idolatries. From there, Jesus invites us to profess our faith with authenticity, weighing fleeting goods and loving eternal goods immensely. He reminds us that we are in the world but that we are citizens of the heavenly kingdom.

Jesus says: "I am no longer in the world, while they are in the world; I go to you, Holy Father, take care in your name, those you gave me, so that they may be one like us. I told them your word, and the world hated them, because they are not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you free them from the Evil One. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world" (John 17: 11, 14-16).

Jesus' response: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" shows us that our Lord is a jealous God, who does not share his glory with any other god. This is confirmed by the prophet Isaiah in today's first reading, when he says: "I am the Lord, and there is no other; Outside of me there is no god. I give you the insignia, although you do not know me, so that they may know from east to west that there is no other besides me" (Isaiah 45:5-6).

This message also announced by the apostle Saint Paul, as we have heard in the Epistle (I Thessalonians 1:1-10), was received with the joy of the Holy Spirit by the Christian community of Thessaloniki, which led them to turn away from idols and to convert to the living and true God to the point of becoming a model for other communities. The Thessalonians knew how to remain united to God with a firm faith, a dear love and a persevering hope in our Lord Jesus Christ despite the many persecutions they received from their environment. They had their feet on the ground and their eyes on God. Their hope was in Jesus whom God raised from the dead and who would return to rescue them from death. In this sense it is easy to understand that they were messengers of the gospel in word and deed.

The testimony of the Thessalonians in the beginnings of the Church continues to be valid for us in these modern times where everything that smacks of the gospel is the object of ridicule and contempt by many people and institutions and where persecution takes the name of discredit. In this circumstance it is difficult to be a witness of God; Sometimes we get scared, we do not like to face difficulties or persecution, but when it comes we must accept it with a calm spirit as the apostle Peter commands: "Dear ones, do not be surprised at the fire that has broken out against you, as if it were something extraordinary. ; Rather, rejoice in sharing the sufferings of Christ, so that when his glory is revealed, you too will overflow with joy and gladness. If they insult you for being Christians, blessed are you, for the Spirit of God rests on you" (I Peter 4:12-14).

Let us go far away from the easy path, let us not seek security in the powers of the world that although they seem strong, melt like snow, rather let us make God our refuge and we will not be afraid of death, then we can say with Saint Paul: "Who will separate us? of the love of Christ? Tribulation, anguish, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword? In all these circumstances we came out more than victors thanks to the one who loved us. I am sure that neither death nor life, neither angels nor powers, neither present nor future, nor powers, neither height nor depth, nor any creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:35, 37 -39).