

# LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL

[www.orlaghinthecity.ie](http://www.orlaghinthecity.ie)



## TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

18th October 2026

**Matt. 22:15** Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap Jesus in what he said. <sup>16</sup> So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. <sup>17</sup> Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?” <sup>18</sup> But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? <sup>19</sup> Show me the coin used for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius. <sup>20</sup> Then he said to them, “Whose head is this, and whose title?” <sup>21</sup> They answered, “The emperor’s.” Then he said to them, “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

1. The story sees a mixture of religion and politics, a potentially explosive combination. Jesus does not ask us to avoid politics, but that our involvement in the affairs of the world be informed by the perspective of the Reign of God. How does the gospel give you a vision of how your involvement in society should be?
2. Pharisees and Herodians were not natural allies but a shared dislike of Jesus brought them together in an attempt to discredit him. Perhaps you experience the same opposition in society today when you profess to being a Catholic. Jesus did not get into an argument with them but simply professed his belief in the priority of God in his life. What have you found helpful in bearing witness to the fact that you are still a Catholic?
3. Jesus recognises that we can be faced with conflicting claims for attention. He does not tell us how to solve that dilemma but challenges us to make sure that our allegiance to God takes priority. When have you been faced with a conflict of loyalties? What helped you to get your priorities right?

**JOHN BYRNE OSA - Intercom**

Today's passage is built around the saying in verse 21, “Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God”. It is a “wisdom saying” and the passage invites us to enter into it with our feelings. Its truth should touch us so deeply that we are filled with gratitude, and also with humility as we realise that we do not live up to it - as individuals, as a Church and as communities. The saying then becomes a call to repentance.

In order to bring the saying alive in this way, we need to read it in the context of a story, which is how it is presented to us, not as an abstract timeless truth but as a response to a situation. The question for us then is, when did we experience a similar situation? And then, who was the Jesus who spoke as he did?

We must be careful to interpret the saying correctly. In the course of the Church's history, it has often been taken to mean that there are areas of life which are Caesar's domain and other areas which are God's.

In fact the saying has been used to justify the claim that religious leaders should not “interfere” in secular fields like politics, economics or culture.

This could not possibly be the meaning, however. The entire teaching of Jesus, indeed the entire bible, insists that the whole of creation “belongs to God” - “his is the earth and the fullness thereof”. There is no question of “separate domains” therefore, since everything belongs to God.

The saying is rather about keeping priorities right.

The passage is intended to evoke memories of people or communities getting priorities wrong:

- parents who provide material benefits for their children but neglect to give them quality time.
- teachers who stress success in examinations and forget to praise those who are not successful but do their best.
- Church leaders who are more concerned with what people think than with being faithful to the message of Jesus.
- public officials who work for popularity and compromise their integrity

**MICHEL DE VERTEUIL - Lectio Divina on the Sunday Gospels**

An event earlier in the first century helps us grasp what is at stake in this gospel story. In AD 6, there was a revolt by Judas of Galilee against the imposition by the Romans of the poll tax. The grounds given were that it was tantamount to idolatry. Judas and his sons were crucified. The “innocent” or “theoretical” question is therefore fraught with real danger.

Thought for the day

The relationship between religious faith and public life is perplexing. In some societies, even today, there is virtually no difference between the two. In other, more secular societies, any expression of religious conviction is unacceptable in public. It is true of course that there is an appropriate distinction and even separation to be made, as indeed Jesus does make to-day in the Gospel. But on at least two issues, there is bound to be some crossover. Religious faith informs our values and in society today policies and laws must be grounded, not in a particular faith certainly, but in values nevertheless.

**KIERAN O'MAHONY OSA - [www.tarsus.ie](http://www.tarsus.ie)**

Jesus is not thinking about God and Caesar as two powers who can exact their rights from their subjects. As a faithful Jew he knows that ‘the earth and all it contains’ belong to God (Ps 24). What is it that can belong to Caesar that is not God’s? Only his unjust money.

If someone is entangled in the system of Caesar, he will feel obliged to fulfill his obligations; but if he enters into the process of the coming of God’s kingdom, he must know that the poor belong to God alone; they are his favoured children. Nobody should take advantage of them. This is what Jesus teaches according to the truth. We, his followers, must with stand anyone, known or unknown to us, being sacrificed to any political, economic, religious or ecclesiastical power. Those whom the powerful humiliate belong to God and God alone.

**JOSÉ A. PAGOLA - Following in the Footsteps of Jesus**

## Reflection

It is sometime said that religion and politics don’t mix, but it is very often hard to separate them. They are both concerned with how we live our lives though from different perspectives, and today’s gospel and first reading help us to illustrate the difference. As Christians we are not called to live in ivory towers detached from the world and its problems. Rather we are to respond to the world from a kingdom perspective, in other words we are asked to do what Jesus did. Our politics must always be informed by the vision Jesus offers us of a world in which God cares for everyone.

**SEAN GOAN - Let the Reader Understand**

Jesus is in a dangerous situation, because in an unholy alliance, the Pharisees have brought along the Herodians with them. The Herodians were great supporters of the Roman empire, so tensions here would have been high. If Jesus answers ‘no’ to their question about paying taxes to Caesar he risks being reported to the Roman authorities as a revolutionary; if he says ‘yes’ then he may be accused of colluding with the occupying Empire and abandoning the people. Jesus sees through this malice and invites us to explore a third way, one that is not a revolt but also does not lie down and submit to oppression. Yes, do your civic duty, but do not forget what belongs to God; this overrides any political power. This is how one truly advocates for the kingdom of heaven in the here and now.

***There is no time to lose: we have received the earth as a garden-home from the Creator; let us not pass it on, to future generations as a wilderness. (Pope Francis)***

*We have the ability to change the way businesses and governments operate, for example by moving away from produce with excess packaging, finding out if your bank, university, diocese or insurance company have divested from the fossil fuel industry, supporting the Youth Climate Movement who are persuading governments to change course. What else comes to mind?*

**TRÍONA DOHERTY & JANE MELLETT - Go Deeper**