

Reflection on the gospel of the 29th Sunday in ordinary time [Year A]

In today's gospel Jesus is confronted with a malicious attack on His sincerity as a teacher of divine truth. The Pharisees and Herodians, the authoritarian custodians of the Jewish laws, were out to get Him, because He dared to question their true motives in the religious observance of the Law of Moses. They were more concerned with their own prestige in Jewish society than the Self-compliance these Laws were designed for. They used these laws to better themselves by bullying the people into submission with rules and regulations without any regard for its integrity of life.

They asked Jesus the following question: Is it permissible to pay taxes to the Roman occupier? "which was meant to discredit Him as a fantasist. The question doesn't ask for His knowledge regarding the divinity of life but for a political opinion. The whole population of Israel loathed the Romans, who ruled the country with an iron fist. Not only were the people treated by them as slaves in their own country, but they raised extortionate taxes from them. Taxes not for the benefit of the Jewish state, but to further the power of Caesar. The trap of this question is related to a yes or no answer. If Jesus had said yes, it is permissible to pay taxes to Caesar than He would have lost the trust of the people. If He would have said no than He would be regarded as a dangerous threat to the Romans.

The brilliance of His answer is completely exposing the two-faced arrogance of the ruling religious class. "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, but give to God what belongs to God". With this answer not only does Jesus confront the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, but it is also truth inspired teaching to all people of good will in every age. "Give to the world what belongs to the world, but give to God what belongs to God".

Gabriel Doll