

Benjamin Franklin once said "In this world, nothing is certain except death and taxes." However, as Catholics, we consider not only this world but the world to come. This is key in understanding the response Jesus gives to the Pharisees in our Gospel reading this weekend: "Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."

The Pharisees had asked Jesus whether or not it is lawful to pay the census tax. As usual, they are trying to trap Jesus in a no-win situation. If Jesus answers in the affirmative, then he will be viewed as a Roman sympathizer, siding with the foreign occupiers and oppressors of God's chosen people. If he answers in the negative, then he will essentially be calling for a tax revolt, which had happened about 25 years before this moment. Either way, the Pharisees hope to discredit or dispatch with this wandering rabbi who is upsetting the status quo.

The Lord's solution, of course, makes a way out of this tight spot. He asks the Pharisees to look at the coin and identify whose image is on it. Caesar, of course, as Roman coins contained the image of the emperor much as American coins have an imprint of one president or another. There is, however, a deeper truth in this simple exercise along with the answer: "Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God." Caesar's image is imprinted on the coin, but God's image is imprinted on the human person. We are, after all, created in the image and likeness of God.

The question for us, then, is: What belongs to God? What do we owe to Him? The answer is worship. Worship is what we owe to God, because of His nature as sovereign creator of the universe, in gratitude for the gift of our life, in supplication for our needs. From this truth inscribed into the order of creation by God Himself comes the obligation to keep holy the Lord's Day.

So, be sure to pay your taxes, rendering to the government what it's due. But even more so, give to God what belongs to Him, what He is owed, our joyful worship on Sundays from a heart imprinted with His image.