



Mark 12:13-17

Some Pharisees and Herodians were sent to Jesus to ensnare him in his speech. They came and said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are a truthful man and that you are not concerned with anyone's opinion. You do not regard a person's status but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not? Should we pay or should we not pay?" Knowing their hypocrisy he said to them, "Why are you testing me? Bring me a denarius to look at." They brought one to him and he said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" They replied to him, "Caesar's." So Jesus said to them, "Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God." They were utterly amazed at him.

Introductory Prayer: Lord, I come before you humbly. As one who has frequently fallen into sin, I am aware of my weakness. Your great love, though, assures me that your grace can keep me on the path to holiness.

Petition: Give me guidance, Lord, on a big decision that I have to make.

1. Setting the Trap: The Pharisees and Herodians use an old ploy ? flattery ? to try to trap Jesus. It is a ploy that enjoys a long shelf-life. Flattery can cause us to lower our guard. "You're an intelligent person, why don't you ...?" Or: "You're a good parent, you already have two kids. You don't really believe the Church on ...?" Being Christian in the world often means living among devious people. Hence, Jesus warned us to "be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves" (Matthew 10:16). To maintain a balance, we have to live only for God. Is it Christ who shapes my day?

2. Lying in Wait: They pose a false dilemma to Jesus. It's "either/or." Either Jesus must

accept Caesar totally, or rebel against Rome. Such is how the world sees it. It's still either/or. Either we embrace Darwinism (no questions asked), or we cling to Creationism. Either we are tolerant of alternate lifestyles, or we are insufferable bigots. But things are more complicated than that. Moreover, the Catholic faith is often "both/and." Hence, we give to Caesar and to God what belongs to each. And how do we decide what belongs to whom? That's where things get tricky. And that is precisely why we are called as Christians to develop our gifts, our intelligence, our prayer life ? so as to make the right choices. Catholicism is not a religion for robots. It demands that we use our freedom and gifts responsibly to do God's will. Am I using my gifts well? Do I develop my skills and intellect so as to better serve God?

3. The Trap is Sprung, the Game is Over: Jesus' response floors his critics. Why? Partly because he throws the question back to them. Now they have to decide what belongs to Caesar — and what belongs to God. "You must decide," was Karol Wojtyla's signature phrase as a confessor. Nothing can so frighten us as freedom. It frightened Jesus' audience. How am I using my own freedom? How am I using the time God gives me?

Conversation with Christ: Help me realize, Lord, that you are calling me in freedom. You respect the freedom you gave me, even if I misuse it. But I don't want to misuse it. I want to render a good account of my life at Judgment Day.

Resolution: I will read some Scripture or a few paragraphs from the Catechism or a papal document today, to try to form myself better in the faith.