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Today, the Pharisees, members of the major religious sect of Judaism in Jesus' day, and the Herodians, members of a major militant political party in Israel, come to Jesus to try and trip him up by asking him a question about paying taxes. They hope they can trigger him to say either that Jews should not pay the taxes to the occupying Roman Overlords, or that they must pay them. Jesus' antagonists do not really care which way he answers the question, because they hope they can make Him look bad either way. If he says, *Don't pay the taxes*, he will sound like a revolutionary, and the Romans will have a good reason to arrest Him. If he says, *Do pay the taxes*, His enemies can label Him a collaborator with the Romans and a traitor to his own people. Smart fellow that He is, Jesus nuances the argument, and His opponents marvel at His wisdom.

To the modern American, we might wonder why this was ever a subject to question our Lord about. Poor Jesus, He constantly has people coming to Him hoping to trip Him up. First, it was the Scribes, those from Jesus' own religious sect and then the Pharisees and Sadducees, two different religious sects who disagree on major theological points. Both groups, normally at war with each other, join forces to ensnare Jesus. Today, it is Pharisees and members of a political party who take their name from a very unpopular Roman puppet, Herod.

But the issue of paying taxes to Caesar was complicated. The Romans were seen as the hated occupiers of a land given to the Jews by God. But what was more offensive to the ancient Jews, to add insult to injury, was that to them Roman coins were seen as portable idols. The coins were imprinted with the images of Roman gods. Furthermore, at this time in history, Octavian Augustus Caesar, bowing to the mass adoration of his person, in all humility allowed his image and likeness to be printed on the coins. All of this was greatly offensive to the scrupulous, monotheistic, graven image-abhorring Jews.

And so, Jesus asks them to show him a coin, and then he asks them whose name and picture are on it. When they reply, "Caesar's," Jesus explains, *if it has his name and picture on it, it must be his -- and there can't be any reason not to give a man what belongs to him. Render unto Caesar's what is Caesar's. But you also must give God what belongs to God -- that is to say, following the same logic, you must give God what has His name and picture on it.* In a country where we claim separation of Church and State, this passage – *Render unto Caesar, what is Caesar's*, which gets carried out by paying our taxes to the government, doing our civic duty of voting, patriotism, and obeying the law of the land. *Render unto God,*

*the things that are God's* means give offerings and tithes to the Church, attend Church, try to keep the ten commandments, and pray and read the Bible daily.

But what tends to happen is we begin to think of things in compartments or boxes. We have our Caesar box, and our God box, *and never the twain shall meet*. We forget that these two boxes are not supposed to be separate or dual, as in the dual personality that tends to treat Church and State as two alien entities which have nothing to do with one another. Christian tradition teaches us that whatever power or authority Caesar has at the moment is only and ever God-given by Divine Permission. Matters of the earthly state must always be accountable to the God who has given them the freedom to rule in the first place. God is the Omnipotent Ruler of the universe, after all.

But remember, Jesus is clever. He turns their question inside out. He is not as interested in their question about paying taxes to Caesar. He takes the discussion up higher, by saying to Pharisees and Herodians, those who had labeled themselves such, by simply saying *render therefore...unto God the things that are God's*. Remember that those Roman coins had images of Roman god's and Emperors on them. Jesus makes the point to them, that what has God's name and picture is their own selves. Man is imprinted with the image and likeness of God. They are not stamped with the image of Pharisee or Herodian, but with the image of God. And the same is true for us. We are stamped with God's image, God made you in His image; He seals you with His cross and calls you by His name when you are baptized into His Body, the Church. And this transcends politics, family, and even denomination. We as Christians owe a total commitment to God.

The demand for total commitment suggests one of the fundamental questions the Bible poses for everyone -- the question, *Do we really trust God?* God led the children of Israel on a forty-year trek from Egypt to Jericho to find out how they would answer that question. Hundreds of years later they failed spectacularly and were carried out of the Promised Land and exiled into Babylon, which is what our Old Testament Lesson addresses. And instead of God pouring out punishment and wrath on them, He teaches them to seek their peace and the peace of all around them. He tells them to live in Babylon, but to always remember that they belong to Him, and that they are exiles in a strange land. Likewise, St. Paul writes to the Philippians to place their trust in God only, not in pleasure, not in any earthly man, not even to overly concern themselves with earthly things and worldly success, but that our concerns are first and foremost to be in God. To be sure, we live in Caesar's realm, under his authority which has been given to Him by God, we do all those duties which have been given us, but we are not to be defined by

*them, for our conversation is in heaven; from whence we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We are to render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar, and unto God the things that are God's, which is all of us, ourselves, our souls, and bodies, that we be made more and more in His image, that we may be fashioned like unto the body of his glory, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.*