



Matthew 22:15-21

15 The Pharisees went away to work out between them how to trap Jesus in what he said. **16** And they sent their disciples to him, together with the Herodians, to say, 'Master, we know that you are an honest man and teach the way of God in an honest way, and that you are not afraid of anyone, because a man's rank means nothing to you. **17** Tell us your opinion, then. Is it permissible to pay taxes to Caesar or not?' **18** But

Jesus was aware of their malice and replied, 'You hypocrites! Why do you set this trap for me? **19** Let me see the money you pay the tax with.' They handed him a denarius, **20** and he said, 'Whose head is this? Whose name?' **21** 'Caesar's,' they replied. He then said to them, 'Very well, give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar - and to God what belongs to God.'

Other readings: Isaiah 45:1,4-6 Psalm 95 (96) 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5

In our reading of the Gospel of Matthew we continue to hear of incidents during the ministry of Jesus in Jerusalem in the time leading up to his death and resurrection. There is an atmosphere of foreboding. There are plots to trap Jesus in order to bring charges against him. Jesus repeatedly reprimands the Jewish leaders for their unwillingness to listen to him.

The Pharisees attempt to 'trap Jesus in what he said'. The issue is that of the rightness of paying taxes. Palestine was under the rule of the Roman empire. Was it right to pay taxes to this pagan power machine? The question is like those asked of politicians and church leaders today to try to get them to give simple answers to complex questions. Jesus throws the question back to the questioners. He knows that the intention is to catch him out and does not engage in any debate. Jesus' response is: 'Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God.'

As Christians we cannot cut ourselves off from the affairs of the world, but we should never compromise our beliefs and values. Our decisions and our loyalties must be decided by what furthers the 'common good'.

Today we begin to read from the earliest letter of St Paul in the New Testament, the first letter to the Thessalonians. Paul assures the community that he remembers them in his prayers. The unity of the church, made up of local communities, is built up above all through prayer. Paul goes on to praise the people of this community for their active faith, their works of love and their perseverance in hope. The impact of the good news on them has been dramatic. The Holy Spirit has transformed their lives.

Do I have the patience to reflect on complex questions so that my actions may be for the good of all?

Am I willing to listen to the teaching of Jesus, especially when my actions are challenged?

We pray that we may always show honesty and truth in our dealings with others.

We pray that our lives will be full of faith, hope and love.