

# **LOOKING TO SUNDAY®**

**Sunday, October 19, 2014**

This email, entitled Looking to Sunday®, focuses on the Gospel Reading for the coming Sunday. It prepares readers to hear God's Word at Mass and it offers a point of reflection to consider in the days leading to Sunday. Looking to Sunday is written by Father Tom Iwanowski.

## **A TAX QUESTION**

If we were putting together the best debating team of all time, we would certainly have to include Jesus. In the Gospels, his opponents never get the best of him. Jesus always has a response that leaves them stunned and amazed. We see an example of that in this Sunday's Gospel. (Matthew 22:15-21)

The Pharisees and the Herodians come to Jesus and ask, "Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?" Certainly no person likes paying taxes. But this tax was particularly hated by the Jewish people. It required every adult to pay the equivalent of a day's wage to the Romans. The Jews were being taxed to help pay the salaries of the hated Roman troops occupying their nation. Furthermore, the coin used to pay the tax had an image of Caesar with an inscription proclaiming him to be divine.

When his opponents question Jesus about the tax they believe they have him trapped. If Jesus says not to pay the tax, he puts himself in open defiance of Rome. But if he endorses the tax, he angers his people, he encourages cooperation with the despised Romans, and he permits the use of a coin whose image and inscription defies the First Commandment. God was the ruler of the Jewish nation, he alone was God.

So Jesus asks his opponents to produce the coin used to pay the tax. He then asks whose image and inscription appear on the coin. When they say Caesar's, Jesus tells them, "Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."

Rather than giving them a direct answer, Jesus gives them a principle that remains true to this very day. There are things of Caesar and things of God.

What is marked with the image of Caesar belongs to him. That being the case we owe Caesar, we owe the state, certain obligations.

What belongs to God is God's, and what belongs to God is also marked with an image. As we read in the first chapter of Genesis, "God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27)

As people marked with the image of God, we are God's and we have an even greater duty to him. We owe God lives lived in imitation of Jesus, the one who perfectly responded in love and obedience to his heavenly Father.

The scriptures tell us that Pharisees and Herodians "were amazed" at the response of Jesus. (Matthew 22:22) If we truly understood that response we too would be amazed at what we owe the God whose image we bear. "Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."