

*HOMILY – 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 16, 2011
Father Jim Carini*

“Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?”

A young lady was basking in the sun's rays on a beach when a little boy in his swimming trunks, carrying a towel, came up to her and asked her,

“Do you believe in God?” She was surprised by the question but she replied, *“Why, yes, I do.”*

Then he asked her: *“Do you go to church every Sunday?”* Again, her answer was *“Yes!”*

He then asked: *“Do you read your Bible and pray every day?”*

Again she said, *“Yes!”*

By now her curiosity was very much aroused. The little boy sighed with relief and said, *“Will you hold my quarter while I go in swimming?”*

The little boy was being straightforward and honest in his questions because he wanted to entrust to the lady something valuable. The Pharisees are not being honest. They have no intent in entrusting Jesus with anything. They are not looking for the answer to a question. They don't want someone to hold their quarter. They are looking for a way to get rid of this trouble making Nazarene named Jesus.

The Jewish authorities sought to trap Jesus in a religious-state issue. The Jews resented their foreign rulers and despised paying taxes to Caesar. They posed a dilemma to test Jesus to see if he was loyal to them and to their understanding of religion. If Jesus answered that it was lawful to pay taxes to a pagan ruler, then he would lose credibility with the Jewish nation who would regard him as a coward and a friend of Caesar. If he said it was not lawful, then the Pharisees would have grounds to report him to the Roman authorities as a political trouble-maker and have him arrested.

Jesus avoided their trap by confronting them with the image of a coin. Coinage in the ancient world had great political power. Rulers issued coins with their own image and inscription on them. In a certain sense the coin was regarded as the personal property of the ruler. Where the coin was valid the ruler held political sway over the people. Since the Jews used

the Roman currency, Jesus explained that what belonged to Caesar must be given to Caesar.

This story has another deeper meaning as well. We, too, have been stamped with God's image since we are created in his own likeness – *"God created man in his own image ..male and female he created them"* (Genesis 1:26-27). We rightfully belong not to ourselves, but to God who created us and redeemed us in the precious blood of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ (see 1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Each one of us retains double citizenship. We are citizens of our own countries as well as citizens of God. We owe our government, federal, state and local, for the things we receive: police protection, fire protection, clean water, roads, education, transportation infrastructure, etc. We pay with the currency of our country. However, at times we think that the accumulation of such currency determines our worth. Our true worth, however, comes from the fact that the likeness of God is inscribed on our bodies and souls. The denarius bears the image of Caesar. We bear the image of God.

So what belongs to God? God wants our heart—our total surrender to his will. Not just once in a while, but always. He wants us to gratefully discern his presence and act according to his will. His will is that we know him, love him, and serve him faithfully. Do you remember that from your catechism days? Only when we are "right" with God can we know with assurance that we are "right" with our neighbor as well.

Such repaying to God, begins with our considering what belongs to God and what belongs to us. When we do, we realize that all our possessions, all our money, all our stuff, including life itself, are blessings from God. They are given to us for a time. Our lease on those goods ends when we die.

While we have those blessings we are to use them to make a positive difference in our world and we are to offer them to God as a way of acknowledging they are truly his.