

Sermon Matthew 22 15 22 18<sup>th</sup> S af Pent

Sermon: 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Matthew 22:15-22: Paying taxes to Caesar

Theme: Give to God what belongs to God

Goal: We give back to God what belongs to Him: Our lives, our goods,  
our time, out talents...

Dear Friends,

**Introduction:** *“The Christian is a member of two kingdoms. On the one hand he is member of the earthly realm in which he lives and owes obedience to its laws. On the other hand he is a member of God's kingdom because Christ has redeemed him with His blood. Through faith in Christ we become God's children (and citizens of His Kingdom). We owes God obedience and wants to do God's will... Now we are to behave as His children, namely, obey the Lord who has redeemed us.”* (MTC Series A, p. 131).

Jesus was confronted in this text with a issue concerning the two kingdoms. Representatives of the church came to Him and asked Him a question related to the government. To understand better the situation, the Concordia Self Study Bible has a nice commentary: *“The Pharisees were ardent nationalists, opposed to Rome rule. The Herodians, as their name indicates, supported the Roman rule of the Herods. Now, however, the Pharisees enlisted the help of the Herodians to trap Jesus in His words. After trying to put Him off guard with flattery, they sprang the question: 'Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar (in Rome) or not?' If He said 'No', the Herodians would report Him to the Roman governor and He would be executed for treason. If He said 'Yes', the Pharisees would denounce Him to the people as disloyal to His nation.”* - So, the wise answer Jesus gave closed their mouths.

As part of His answer, the Lord Jesus lays down our responsibility to God: “Give to God what belongs to God”. This is the theme of our message.

## **I – In the Old Testament**

Since the beginning, people recognized that what they were and what they had was a blessing of God. And they brought their Thanksgiving offerings to the Lord.

“Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord; and Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock” (Gen 4:3-4).

Abraham, recognizing that Melchizedek was a priest of God Most High, gave him a tenth of everything. (Gen 14:18-19).

When Moses was building the Tabernacle in the wilderness, “all the Israelite men and women who were willing brought to the Lord freewill offerings for all the work the Lord through Moses had commanded them to do” (Ex 35:29). And the workers in charge of the building said to Moses after some days: “The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the Lord commanded to be done” (Ex 36:5).

Even the children were brought back to God as a living sacrifice, recognizing that they belong to God. We read about the baby Jesus: “When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons” (Luke 2:22-24). - This is a nice link to Tyson, who was brought to Jesus in the Holy Baptism today.

We have several other good examples in the Old Testament how people worshiped and served God bringing back to Him what belongs to him. The New Testament follows similar ways of worshiping, always recognizing with thanksgiving that everything belongs to God.

## II – In Luther's time

As we are celebrating Reformation Month, it is good to use this opportunity to see how it was in Luther's days (500 years ago). Unfortunately the established church of that time was not following the patterns of the Bible. Misuse of church's money was a big problem at the time of the Reformation. Forgiveness of sin was sold by the church and people paid to receive “Papers of Indulgences”. Luther couldn't accept this practice and raised his voice against it. He wrote *“The 95 Theses on the Power of Indulgences”* to discuss the matter with his colleagues and others. And this is considered the beginning of the Reformation Movement, from where our church originates, - the first of the Protestant Churches.

Luther went back to the Bible and preached that forgiveness and salvation are not a matter of money; these and other spiritual blessings cannot be purchased. They are a free gift of God to everyone who believes in Jesus. In fact, God had purchased us, *“not with gold or silver, but with the precious blood and with the innocent suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (*Small Catechism*). We cannot purchase anything from Him. We belong to Him and whatever we have belongs to Him as well.

Luther spoke about money as a blessing of God to take care of our family, to help the needy and to help the church to accomplish her missionary task to preach the Gospel all over the world.

Luther based his Reformation work only on the Bible. SOLA SCRIPTURE – only the Scripture, is one of the pillars of Luther's Reformation. As his heirs, we cannot go far away from the Bible, but we always have to return to its principles and teachings.

## III – We

I think that the question raised by our text today is not a big dilemma for us: “Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.” As

citizens, we know that we owe to pay taxes and whatever else is charged by the government. It is our duty. - And as Christians and church members we bring our thanksgiving offerings to the church. But it is good to know that our offerings are not just something 'on the side' of our Christian lives. First of all, we need to acknowledge that we give because He first gave himself to us. “God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son...” - Secondly, we don't belong to ourselves, but we belong to God, by His grace in Jesus. Living in His Kingdom, we offer ourselves to Him, as Paul wrote to the Romans (12:1): “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.” As we offer ourselves, we don't offer only part of our money in regular offerings; but we offer our time, our skills, our goods, and our family – we offer everything to Him, putting it in God's hand to bless and to take care of them. And whatever He needs for His work and to share with the needy, He can use it. We came naked to this world and we will leave it with nothing. We are just managers of God's blessings.

**Conclusion:** Finally, one more thought to conclude: The coin that they showed to Jesus had the portrait of Caesar, the Emperor. Therefore Jesus said to them: “Give to Caesar what is Caesar's.” - Where is the portrait of God so that we can recognize what belongs to God? - *“What is it that bears the stamp of God's image? It is the human soul itself, made in God's image and redeemed by Christ's life, death and resurrection!”* (Series A, p. 225). - When little Tyson was baptized, he received the stamp of God in His life and he was marked by the sign of the cross upon his forehead and upon his heart, as one redeemed by Christ the crucified. He received a new name and now he carries God's name. This happened with all of us as well when we were baptized. We have the stamp of God. People cannot see God; but they can see the Christians. What a blessing it is to belong to God! Let us give thanks to Him all the days of our lives! Amen.

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