

29th Sun A
Should We Pay Taxes?

Introduction...

Wow! What a question in today's Gospel...:

"Should we pay taxes?"

Of course, we might not like Jesus' answer.

Basically, he says, "Yes."

He doesn't say what fair or unfair taxes are.

Jesus let's that up to us to figure out,

This morning I would like to reflect a bit on the second part of Jesus' answer to the question in today's Gospel.

Jesus said:

Render to God what belongs to God.

Our question is,

"What do we render to God?

What belongs to God?"

Refrain... Render to God what belongs to God.

I Prayer Belongs to God

First, what belongs to God is our giving God our attention...
that's called *Prayer*.

Mother Theresa described prayer as,

"Making room for God in our hearts."

Usually our hearts are cluttered with so many other objects...

Here's a brief poetic reflection I wrote about our **Cluttered Hearts**

A Cluttered Heart

3/24/'05

A room cluttered
 With clothes
 With shoes
 With computer
 And game box
 And DVDs
 And TV

A musty smell
Dark and dusty.

My heart cluttered with
 Dark worries
 Musty, half-remembered wrongs
 Today's plans
 Tomorrow's fears
 Time worn prayers

Does God hear?

God, free me.
 Unclutter my heart
 Let me rest in you
 Remember your love...
 Unburden my heart
 From bondage to self....
 Untie my heart...
 From worry-sickness.

Of God, come to my assistance.
O Lord, make haste to help me.

Sometimes I hear people say that they don't *have* time for God in a busy day.

That just means they don't make time for God in their busy day.

Does God deserve our time? How do you answer?

I have worked with folks in AA for over the past 30 years.

My friends in AA say that taking time for God each day is a matter of life and death – spiritual life and death.

Spirituality is a big part of AA.

Leading a spiritual life is all-important.

And daily prayer is one of the key components of living spiritually each day.

What are possible prayer times?

- morning prayer (“Good morning God”, instead of “Good God, morning?”);
- meal prayers, even over a quick lunch;
- prayers during the day asking God’s help, or thanking God, or saying, “Oops, I’m sorry;”
- evening prayer, thanking God for the day’s blessings, and asking pardon for any “slips”.

Reading a Psalm each day, maybe in the morning, can also be a wonderful way of starting our day off.

Have you ever prayed one of the Psalms?

Take a look at Pss 23, 27, 51 and 139.

What beautiful prayers.

Read them slowly. Talk to God about them.

Do you know how to find the Psalms in the Bible?

(Look in the index in the front of your Bible.)

How about praying the Rosary on the way to work or at the end of the day.

Why pray during the day?

Does God need our daily prayers?

No, God doesn't need our daily prayer... *we do!*
We need to bring God into our day,
lest we forget about God and start thinking that...

- ❖ Everything depends on us
- ❖ We're the center of the universe
- ❖ Life is all about us: our worries, our bills, our health, our kids or grandkids.

We forget about God, and our hearts become cluttered.
Prayer is making room in our hearts for God.

Refrain... Render to God what belongs to God.

II Obedience

What else do we "render to God"?

I would say "obedience".

Oh, oh! Bad word for us Americans.

We will bow to no one.

We want it our way.

What's the old song say? "I did it my way!"

I suppose the question is,

"Can we really trust God to do it God's way?"

"Might God's way be better than our way?"

What is God's way?... Ah there's the question...

What is God's way? What are we to obey?

Jesus came to show us God's way,

and to tell us that our job is to be obedient to God's way.

Remember the story from Luke 10:29-37?

The lawyer asks Jesus what he must do to live according to God's way,
what he must do to be obedient to God?

Jesus asks him what he thinks the answer is?

Question: what do you think the answer is?

What must you do to be obedient to God?

Is that even an issue for you?

Do we ever think about what God would want us to do?

Or, are you worried, as I am, if the Steelers can win today?

We seldom wonder about how we must live if we want to walk along God's way.

Our hearts are so cluttered with other, seemingly more important worries.

Back to the story in Luke 10.

Jesus asks the lawyer,

"What do you think is God's way, God's will?"

The lawyer says, "Keep God's commandments...

Love God and love our neighbor, don't hurt our neighbor."

Jesus says, "That's it!"

What is God's way? Keep the commandments.

Render obedience to God by keeping the commandments.

Do you know the commandments?

How many are there?

What is the 1st commandment? What about the 5th? What about the 10th?
Check out the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for some good insights into
what the commandments might mean for us today.

Back to Luke 10.

The lawyer further questions Jesus, "*And who is my neighbor?*"

Jesus tells a story...

the wonderful story of the Good Samaritan.

Remember it?

The traveler being beaten and robbed by thieves.

Several fellow travelers pass him by,

too busy about their own business to stop and help.

Another traveler comes upon him and stops to help...

He cleans up his wounds,

and takes him to an inn

and pays for his stay while he recuperates.

Then Jesus asks the lawyer, "*Who acted neighborly?*"

Jesus didn't answer the lawyer's question,

"*Who is my neighbor?*"

Jesus didn't try to define who our neighbor is,

No debating about the term 'neighbor'.

Jesus tells a story and then asks, "*Who acted neighborly?*"

"Who reached out to help when another was in need?"

That is God's will, God's way...

to act neighborly towards others, especially those in need.

What's that mean for us?

We can't immediately solve the problem of world poverty – that's a big problem that the nations of the world need to confront and deal with, and it's too big for us individually.

We can't solve the problem of isolated elderly people who have to choose between medicine and food –

that's a big problem too, and needs to be addressed by our country.

These big kinds of problems are something we should be concerned about and knowledgeable about...

But we recognize that we cannot solve them by ourselves or right away.

So the question still remains...

What does it mean for *us* to act neighborly... that is my question?

A Story

I have a retired friend who now lives in the South.

Recently we were together and he was describing some volunteer work he has gotten involved with.

For some people you are born, you work, you retire and you play golf. Not my friend.

Although he plays some golf and enjoys his retirement and not having the responsibilities of working,

he volunteers time each week at a local soup kitchen that feeds a lot of the homeless in the city.

He got to know some of the homeless.

One day a while ago he was walking through a park near the soup kitchen when he spotted Gary. Gary was a meth addict and he was high on meth.

He was sitting on a park bench holding his hand and talking to himself. He didn't look good – few meth addicts look good. As a matter of fact he looked terrible... shabby clothes, hair disheveled, few teeth, skin and bones. You get the picture.

When my friend walked over to him Gary held out his hand and mumbled that he had been bitten by a squirrel. My friend called 911. When the

ambulance came the EMS folks took one look at Gary and talked about just walking away from this mess. My friend insisted that they take Gary to the ER – after all, Gary was a person, even if messed up. My friend also asked that they tell the doctors that Gary had been bitten by a squirrel. The EMS people loaded Gary into the ambulance and headed toward the hospital.

Two days later my friend was helping at the soup kitchen when he saw Gary walking down the sidewalk toward the soup kitchen. He looked a bit better. He had washed up a bit, his hair was combed, and he didn't have that wild look about him. My friend asked him how he was feeling, and he said, "Better than two days ago." Then he showed my friend his bandaged hand and said that he had received rabies shots and he was going to be ok. They headed into the kitchen for breakfast together.

Refrain... Render to God what belongs to God.

Conclusion...

As we continue with this Eucharist we make room in our hearts for God as we lift our hearts in prayer.

And we ask God's help to be obedient to God
and act in a neighborly way toward others,
especially those who are sick,
elderly and lonely,
perhaps in a hospital,
or just in need of a kind word.

In this Eucharist God will come into our hearts...

God will feed us and nourish us.

Let us go and do likewise.

Render to God what belongs to God.