

Render to....

Intro. The story that Isaiah refers to is Cyrus, a pagan king who not only freed the Israelites from the Babylonian captivity, he also sent them home with some money to rebuild their temple. As one writer put it, God used Cyrus to do his will in bringing the Israelites home. [M.McGlone, *NCR*]. It is not usual for the interests of church and state to intersect at times. But each has its own responsibilities in our world. The story is not a classic church versus state conflict. It *is* the classic power struggle between the status quo (the Pharisees) and change (the Lord).

I. Interestingly, we are in the middle of a census. Although we are not paying for each person in our homes, lots of money is to be divided among state and local communities for first responders, streets, water, etc. The question in the gospel is about a tax on every man, woman and slave “from age twelve or fourteen to sixty-five. This tax was to be paid in

Roman currency.” [D.J. Harrington, *Sacra Pagina, the Gospel of Matthew*, Liturgical Press, 1991, p. 310] It was the daily wage of one denarius for each person. Taxes are always a serious issue, but especially between the Israelites and the Roman government. In order to maintain their authority over the religious practice of the Israelites, the Pharisees needed to keep a stable relationship with the local governor and quietly encouraged the payment of the tax. Most cooperation was resisted. Other groups were openly against anything the Romans wanted. This was the tension Pharisees sought to exploit. This confrontation between the Lord and the Pharisees and Herodians was not really about challenging the Roman tax. It was about the Pharisees trying to trap the Lord into trouble with the Romans or losing his popularity with his followers. The Pharisees didn’t help themselves by having a Roman coin in their pocket when they weren’t

supposed to. It also failed because the Lord took a somewhat cooperative approach with the tax while focusing on what is rightly given to God. The next verse says they were amazed at how the Lord got out of the trap *and* turned the discussion away from Caesar and to God.

Concl. God has a way of doing that not only to the Pharisees but to us as well. He often re-directs our questions, causing us to re-examine *our* words and actions. When we ask what is rendered to God, saying it **all** belongs to God it is too simple and a little vague. Of course it does, but what does that mean specifically for each of us daily? Exactly what *are* we giving to God? Tithing is not the only thing although it is important. (Thank you for your continuing generosity in difficult times.) Certainly our lives must be lived doing *his* work and *his* will, not our own. We know that means loving God and loving our neighbor. We also know loving our

neighbor is the more difficult of the two. In our tense and sometimes adversarial world we struggle with it. We are all made in the likeness of the one God. We **are** our sisters' and brothers' keepers. Many of us have never had to deal with times like these. Among us are some who lived through the Great Depression of 1929 and the polio crisis. We could learn from them how to better take care of each other. Church and state should be working together, not against each other or grudgingly, but willingly to lift up and heal all people. FMP/10/18

Fr. Michael Pendergraft, October 18, 2020