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29th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A) 2020

A young lady was soaking up the sun's rays on a Florida 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 lad sighed with relief and said, "Will you hold my quarter while I go in swimming?" The little boy was 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 intention of entrusting anything to Jesus. 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. Remember, the Herodians were Jews who cooperated with Rome for their own financial benefit. The Pharisees, on the other hand, opposed the tax, but paid it anyway to avoid political confrontation with Rome. So, you can see that the Herodians and the Pharisees were at opposite ends of the spectrum and yet they were very comfortable teaming up against Jesus with what they thought would be a foolproof plan to ensnare Him. Just to make the point clear, this would be like

Trump and Pelosi working together for some end! No matter how Jesus answered the question He would end up alienating one of the groups, or so they thought. Jesus gets to the heart of the problem when He asks the question, “Why are you testing me, you hypocrites?” Clearly, the hypocrisy of their question was what angered Him. Both the Herodians and the Pharisees were acting like hypocrites in this whole matter. The word “hypocrisy” comes from the Greek word, *hypokrisis*, which means acting on a stage. When we are hypocritical, we are putting on an act, saying one thing and then doing the opposite. But when our actions betray our words, we have to ask ourselves if we really believe what we say or do. We are all susceptible to hypocrisy. We might lecture children about not spending too much time on their screens and then spend hours and hours watching TV. Or we may claim that we are a team player at work but then create division by criticizing a fellow worker. When we are being really honest with ourselves, I think all of us could think of ways that we might say one thing and do another and thereby convict ourselves of hypocrisy. This is where Jesus’ response to their question can be helpful to us, “He said to them, ‘Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.’” This response eliminates hypocrisy if it is understood as Jesus expects. What Jesus is saying is that it is legitimate to pay the tax. It is necessary for the common good of all citizens to pay the tax to maintain order and stability in the community. But the bigger part of this is “repaying to

God what belongs to God.” What is it that belongs to God? WE DO!!! Remember, we bear His image. But in a higher and even more intimate way, by the grace of our Baptism, each one of us can say “I am the Lord’s; I belong to God.” The prophet Isaiah says, “But now, thus says the Lord, who created you... Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name: you are mine.” (Is 43:1) It is right and just to pay taxes, but what about what we owe to God? We will find salvation, happiness, fulfillment, and endless delight when we give ourselves wholly to God. And, we do this by uniting ourselves to Jesus, Who as God and man is the perfect “image of God.” Perhaps we need to think about giving more love, more prayer, more sacrifice, more obedience back to God. But, the sad part of this is that, in reality, we might find it easier to cheat God than to cheat the IRS. If we cheat on our taxes, someone may soon notify us that we owe more than we claimed to owe. If we cheat on the time we owe God, or cheat on following God’s laws, no angel comes knocking, but it is our loss if we have not met our obligation to God, and what we have lost by cheating God is our authenticity in calling ourselves “Christian.” The more we cheat God, the further we drift away from Him and the more hypocritical we become. It can be a painful process to search our consciences and discover ways in which our actions aren’t lining up with our beliefs. However, the more we work to give to God what

belongs to God, which is our primary obligation, the more we move away from being a hypocrite and becoming more fully Christian.