



October 22, 2023

## 29<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time

"Give to God what belongs to God." Matthew 22:21



Dear Friends;

Most people in modern societies assume that there is a simple dividing line between the category of the religious in contrast to everything non-religious or secular. There is a dividing line, but it runs through both categories of religious and secular. Earlier in this Gospel of Matthew (6:24), Jesus drew the dividing line when he declared, *"You cannot serve both God and Mammon."* (Money is a poor translation of Mammon.)

Mammon is an evil spirit. It is when we make money a god. This demonic force encourages stupidity, greed, and endless dissatisfaction for the sole purpose of encouraging endless acquisition. Mammon is money ruling over human life. It forces us to become dependent on monetary income and financial circumstances. So long as we rely on money for our existence and security we will be enslaved to Mammon.

People are relational beings. No one leads a totally isolated life. We live in interrelated groups, families, professions, classes, and we belong to nations, states, faith groups, and associations. But more basically we are interrelated as members of the growing fellowship of humanity. True wealth is measured in relationships.

Mammon measures all things through the metric of money. It objectifies our relationships. The pursuit of money changes relationships from spiritual to material, until all that is left is the financial value we place on others. And money itself becomes a commodity to constantly pursue. The obsession with money excludes love. Relationships cannot be measured by money. Who are we going to serve?

The corruption of the opponents of Jesus is obvious from the start of our passage from Matthew. The Pharisees and the Herodians (supporters of Herod) hated each other. But they perceived Jesus as a threat to their livelihoods. So, they band together against a common enemy, Jesus. They believe that they have set the perfect trap. But they will be caught in it themselves.

They ask the loaded question whether it is lawful to pay the pole tax to Caesar or not. The tax was paid for enjoying the "benefits" of Roman rule. If Jesus says *"no its not lawful"* he will be seen as subversive and an enemy of Rome. If he says *"yes"* his own people will see him as a collaborator.

Jesus asks for the coin that pays the tax. The damning thing is they have one. Jesus asks, *"whose image is on the coin."* It has the head of emperor Tiberius. He asks, *"Whose inscription?"* The answer comes, *"Caesar"* The inscription reads, *"Tiberius Augustus son of the Divine Augustus."* This money does not disguise the fact that it is part of the spiritual empire of Mammon. The inscription says that the head of the political and economic system is a god. Because of this the Pharisees would never carry one. That one of their allies possesses one is shameful.

Jesus uses the word *"image"* when he asks about the coin. For those steeped in the Torah would know that Jesus is referring to the creation of humans. Genesis tells us that humans are made in the *"image of God."* Jesus calls for a human economy. He asks us which *image* we will serve—God reflected in humans or the god of Mammon?

Peace,

*Fr Ron*

*Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: [www.anne.church](http://www.anne.church)*