

## Mark 12: 13-17

13 Then they sent to him some Pharisees and some Herodians to trap him in what he said. <sup>14</sup>And they came and said to him, 'Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not? <sup>15</sup>Should we pay them, or should we not?' But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, 'Why are you putting me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me see it.' <sup>16</sup>And they brought one. Then he said to them, 'Whose head is this, and whose title?' They answered, 'The emperor's.' <sup>17</sup>Jesus said to them, 'Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.' And they were utterly amazed at him.

**Meditation:** Once again, the authorities seek to 'entrap' Jesus by forcing him to say something to incriminate himself or discredit himself before the people. This time it has to do with one's obligations to the state. The authorities know clearly that in the highly charged atmosphere of the capital city of a state under foreign rule, one's views on paying taxes bears immense political implications. Jesus' response to their question is brilliant, even if easily misunderstood outside its context. Jesus is not offering a compromise formula, nor is he pouring pacifist water on the fire of revolutionary zeal. Indeed, what he does say is as radical and revolutionary as anything anyone could ever say. He is saying baldly that the emperor's claim over a person is, justly or unjustly, over things that matter little: money. God's claim, on the other hand, is over the heart and soul of a person. The emperor may take one's money which he claims is his (it has his imprint on it) but he need not take one's heart and soul. God's image in us means that God has made us and staked God's claim over us. What a liberating idea, is it not? And how revolutionary to believe that nothing or no-one in this world need 'own' us or enslave us at the level where it matters - our heart and soul, our very essence and being.

Does anyone or anything own your heart and soul? Are you enslaved in a situation or circumstance, a relationship that is demeaning or one that brings out the worst in you? Are you entrapped by an attachment, addiction or compulsion that is eating up the best of you? In this season of Covid-19, our fears, anxieties, frustrations, boredom or helplessness can exacerbate all of the above and give us a bad excuse to do nothing or do more that's harmful to us and others. We can always put off doing anything about it all or pretend it doesn't count as this is an unusual time. 'We need to go easy on ourselves' we say to ourselves. But are we setting ourselves up to becoming so enslaved that our very heart and soul will be diminished in ways harder to overcome down the road?

**Prayer:** Empowering God... I cannot but be honest and transparent before you as you see all and know all as it is. Please help me find the way to greater life, even in this time. Show me some simple steps I can take today to begin to experience your empowerment to ever further transformation and liberation from the slavery that is all around me and in me too. I need every win I can get, O God. With you, all things are possible. And yet, don't abandon me even if I'm not quite ready to be totally free; Amen.

