

Elections coming our way and America is bitterly, politically divided. Then we have today's rather politically and theologically charged gospel: "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

Take notice of Jesus' words:

This is a conviction about ownership. If one's name is on it, he owns it. Therefore, give it to him. He knew full well what was on that coin: a picture of Caesar, his likeness, and his inscription. Therefore, give it to Caesar. It belongs to him.

But what we also hear is a call to faith implied in this statement. Jesus' conviction about ownership works in two directions; it cuts both ways. Yes, give to Caesar what's got Caesar's name on it, but give to God what's got God's name on it.

But what is God's? What does God have his name on? Where's God's likeness and inscription? Where's his picture? Where's his name?

Here is your answer: "God created man in his own image. In God's image he created him; male and female he created them". (Genesis 1:27). We are the coin of God.

Our contribution to the parish should be an expression of our gratitude to God, giving back to God all that He has given us. Just look into your checking account or credit card to see what you most identify.

Active participation in the various ministries of the parish is an offering to God of our time and talents, yet another way of giving to God His due, our whole self. Stewardship is a means of giving back to God what is God's.

*Mind you, Jesus was not setting up Caesar as God's equal—God's earthly counterpart. Quite the contrary! We come from God and will return to God, not Trump or Clinton.

Jesus' answer acknowledges our obligation to the state, but affirms our larger obligation to God.

Coins bearing Caesar's image may belong to Caesar, but all things (coins, Caesar, Rome, the planet earth, the universe) come from the mind of God and are under God's dominion.

Caesar's realm is but a speck within God's realm. The days of Caesar's realm are numbered, but God's realm is eternal.

If we call ourselves followers of Christ, then Jesus must shape the way we think about life, including the way you think about politics.

The Problem is that we're always confusing these two, blending them together: giving to Caesar what properly belongs to God alone. When this merger happens in a person's mind—and it can be incredibly subtle, that person begins rendering to Caesar the very thing that belongs only to God: your expressions of your worship, your hope, your allegiance, your identity.

Thus, we experience great division, because we fail to see life with our God centered glasses.

Without those glasses, we let Caesar, or the state call us by name, tell us who we are: You're a Republican or a Democrat, you live in a red state or a blue state, you're a conservative or a liberal or a moderate or a centrist, and so on: political label after political label.

These labels, in turn, define our identity. When that happens, these labels control us; they shape the way we see ourselves, and the way we see others. If that is the way we define ourselves, what is being lost? Our Christian identity.

Litmus test: Do you have a closer affinity to those who share your same political views or to those who share your same theological convictions? Would you have more in common with a non-Christian who votes the way you do or with a Christian who doesn't?

If so, what does that say about your sense of identity? Are you letting Caesar define who you are and what's most fundamental to you and about you? It would be a great victory for Satan if he could use Caesar to divide the church of Jesus Christ.

The Issue: We keep our Christian identity separate from the public sphere, separate from politics because that is what we are told to do – religion is a private thing. Keep it in Sunday. God gets Sunday and Caesar the rest?

To do so, means we have failed to give back what is God's. When we do so, we have lost our true identity, our citizenship to heaven.

Yes, in birth we become the citizens of the country of our birth, but it is by Baptism that we become the citizens of Heaven.

And that is our identity and that is where we place all of our hope, giving to God what is God's, our very self in every dimension of life.

Each of us must do the hard work of asking ourselves: Am I giving to Caesar what belongs to God alone? Who is shaping my identity? Where does my most basic allegiance lie? In what am I placing my hope?