

LITURGY & LIFE
THE EMMAUS JOURNEY

Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle A

A Catholic Update Companion to the Sunday Readings

BEAR THE IMAGE OF GOD

Recognize God's claim • Form conscience • Serve the common good • Live undivided discipleship

1: FOR THE HOMILIST/PCL OR OCIA CO-ORD.: CHRIST SPEAKS - WE LISTEN

Sunday Readings

READING	SCRIPTURE
First Reading	Isaiah 45:1, 4–6
Responsorial Psalm	Psalm 96:1, 3, 4–5, 7–8, 9–10
Second Reading	1 Thessalonians 1:1–5b
Gospel	Matthew 22:15–21

The Heart of This Sunday's Gospel

REPAY TO GOD WHAT BELONGS TO GOD

The Pharisees and Herodians try to trap Jesus with a political question about the census tax. Jesus asks for the coin and points to Caesar's image. Then He gives an answer that reaches beyond taxation: give legitimate civil authority what is due, but give God what belongs to God. The coin bears Caesar's image; every human person bears the image of God. No government, party, ideology, or possession may claim the whole person, because the whole person belongs first to God.

The Liturgical Thread

Isaiah reveals that God can work through Cyrus, a foreign ruler who does not know Him, to accomplish His saving purpose. Psalm 96 calls every nation to give the Lord glory and acknowledge His rule. Paul praises the Thessalonians for faith that works, love that labors, and hope that endures. In the Gospel, Jesus recognizes the limited claims of civil authority while asserting God's ultimate claim over the whole human person.

THE MOVEMENT OF THE READINGS

God works through history → All nations owe Him glory → Faith becomes visible in action → The disciple gives God an undivided life

Listening With the Heart

Listen

Read Matthew 22:15–21 slowly. Notice the flattery, the trap, the coin, and Jesus' question about the image and inscription. Pause over the words "to God what belongs to God."

Reflect

Whose image shapes my identity most deeply? Do political loyalties ever compete with loyalty to Christ? Where does conscience need better formation? What part of my life have I withheld from God?

Pray

Thank God for creating every person in His image. Ask for wisdom in public responsibilities, freedom from contempt and fear, and courage to follow a well-formed conscience. Pray for civil leaders and for those whose dignity is threatened.

Rest

Rest in the truth that you belong to God. Let every lesser identity—citizen, voter, worker, party member, consumer—find its proper place beneath your identity in Christ.

Carry This Word

MATTHEW 22:21

“Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.”

2: FOR THE CATECHIST: THE CHURCH TEACHES - WE LEARN

Catechetical Focus

CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE AND PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY

Catholic discipleship does not divide life into a sacred part that belongs to God and a public part untouched by faith. Civil authority has a legitimate but limited role in serving justice and the common good. The Christian forms conscience through Scripture, prayer, reason, and the teaching of the Church, then acts with prudence, charity, and courage. Because every person bears God's image, political choices must protect human dignity rather than reduce neighbors to labels or opponents.

Catholic Update Resources

PRIMARY CATHOLIC UPDATE

C1605A | Gospel Values in an Election Year...and Beyond: The Challenge of Discipleship

This Update places public life within the larger vocation of discipleship. It helps participants move beyond partisan reflexes and evaluate civic choices through Gospel values, the dignity of the human person, concern for the vulnerable, solidarity, subsidiarity, justice, peace, and the common good. Its purpose is not to tell Catholics which party to support, but to show that faith must inform citizenship before, during, and after an election.

SECONDARY CATHOLIC UPDATE

C8212A | Your Conscience and Church Teaching: How Do They Fit Together?

This Update explains that conscience is not a private preference or permission to do whatever feels right. Conscience is a judgment of reason that must be formed by truth. Scripture, prayer, the moral law, the experience of the Christian community, and the authoritative teaching of the Church help the disciple recognize what is good and choose it faithfully. It provides the practical bridge from Catholic social teaching to responsible moral decision-making.

The Catechist's Companion

Key Teaching

Because we bear God's image, every public choice must honor God's truth and the dignity of our neighbor.

Session Aim

Help participants understand Jesus' teaching on legitimate civil authority and God's ultimate sovereignty, form conscience according to Catholic teaching, and practice public discipleship that protects human dignity and serves the common good.

Formation Objectives

- Explain the setting and political trap in Matthew 22:15–21.
- Distinguish legitimate civil authority from political idolatry.
- Describe conscience as a judgment of reason that requires formation.
- Connect the image on the coin with the image of God in every person.
- Name one concrete way to practice faithful citizenship beyond election day.

Integrating This Week's Catholic Updates

C1605A establishes the public mission: Gospel values must shape civic participation and concern for the common good. C8212A establishes the interior discipline: conscience must be formed by truth and Church teaching before it can guide action responsibly. Social concern without formation can become ideology; conscience language without truth can become preference. Catholic discipleship requires both.

Expand the Conversation

- Why does Jesus ask to see the coin before answering?
- What legitimate responsibilities do Christians owe civil society?
- What does it mean to give the whole self to God?
- How is conscience formed rather than merely followed?

Common Misunderstandings

- Jesus does not command a complete separation between faith and public life; He orders every earthly duty beneath God's sovereignty.
- Catholic social teaching does not fit perfectly within any political party or ideology.
- Conscience is not the same as personal preference; it must seek truth and be formed carefully.
- Respect for authority does not require obedience to unjust commands or silence before grave injustice.
- Political disagreement never removes the obligation to recognize the dignity of another person.

Church References

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 355–361; 1776–1802; 1897–1917; 2234–2246; 2419–2449. Scripture connections: Genesis 1:26–27; Micah 6:8; Matthew 5:13–16; Romans 13:1–10; Acts 5:29; 1 Timothy 2:1–4; James 3:9–10; 1 Peter 2:13–17.

OCIA Connection

OCIA participants are learning not only what Catholics believe but how Catholic faith shapes decisions. This Sunday introduces the responsibility to form conscience, engage society, pray for leaders, obey just laws, resist injustice, and protect human dignity. Initiation into Christ is also initiation into a people sent to serve the world without surrendering to its idols.

Catechist's Insight

PASTORAL CARE

Avoid turning the session into a partisan debate. Jesus refuses the trap of choosing one political camp over another. Emphasize principles, conscience formation, and respect for persons. Participants may hold different prudential judgments while remaining bound by the same moral truths. The goal is neither withdrawal from civic life nor political idolatry, but faithful citizenship rooted in the lordship of God.

Keep the focus on formation rather than party labels. Distinguish non-negotiable moral principles from prudential judgments about how best to apply them. Encourage humility: a well-formed Catholic conscience listens, studies, prays, seeks counsel, and remains willing to be corrected by truth.

3: FOR THE CANDIDATE/CATECHUMEN: THE DISCIPLE RESPONDS - WE LIVE

Living the Gospel This Week

- Does my political speech reflect the dignity of those with whom I disagree?
- Have I formed my views through prayer and Church teaching or mainly through media and party loyalty?
- Do I fulfill civic duties honestly and responsibly?
- Whose dignity is easiest for me to overlook?
- Where am I tempted to make politics, nation, or ideology absolute?
- What part of my life still needs to be returned fully to God?

Choosing to Be an Intentional Disciple

WHAT IS CHRIST ASKING OF ME TODAY?

What allegiance, fear, or habit must be placed beneath my belonging to God?

Intentional discipleship refuses both political indifference and political idolatry. The disciple studies issues, prays, listens to the Church, seeks reliable information, votes responsibly, serves the vulnerable, and speaks truth with charity. No candidate or party becomes a savior; Christ alone receives the whole heart.

Holy Habit

THE DAILY CONSCIENCE EXAMEN

At day's end ask: Where did I honor God's image in another person? Where did anger, ideology, or self-interest distort my judgment? What truth did I avoid? What civic or social responsibility did I fulfill? Conclude: "Lord, form my conscience in truth and teach me to give You my whole life."

Faith Into Practice

- Pray daily for civil leaders, especially those with whom you disagree.
- Read a section of the Catechism on conscience or public authority.
- Examine one important issue through the principles of Catholic social teaching.
- Correct one habit of contemptuous or demeaning political speech.
- Perform one act of service for a vulnerable neighbor.
- Discuss a public issue with someone respectfully and listen before replying.
- Choose one civic responsibility to practice more faithfully.

Personal Reflection

What image or allegiance most influences my choices? If my whole life belongs to God, what must change in the way I speak, decide, vote, work, and serve?

4: FOR THE SPONSOR: THE CHURCH SENDS - WE WITNESS

Sponsor's Path of Accompaniment

Share Your Faith	Share about a time when Catholic teaching challenged a political assumption, corrected a prejudice, or changed the way you understood civic responsibility.
Walk Together	Ask: "What influences your conscience most strongly?" Listen for questions about authority, voting, justice, disagreement, and the Church's public witness.
Pray Together	Read Genesis 1:26–27 and Matthew 22:15–21. Thank God for His image in every person and ask for wisdom, courage, and charity in public life.
Experience the Church	Explore a parish ministry that serves the common good—respect life, food assistance, immigration support, prison outreach, care for creation, or advocacy for the vulnerable.
Continue the Journey	Each person chooses one Catholic social teaching principle to study and one concrete civic or service action to complete before the next meeting.

Faith at Home

Place a coin beside a Bible or crucifix during family prayer. Ask whose image appears on the coin and whose image appears in every person. Each household member names one way to honor God's image in a neighbor during the week. Pray together for public officials, first responders, teachers, and those whose dignity is threatened.

Parish Life

Invite the parish to examine how it forms consciences and serves the common good. Are parishioners taught Catholic social principles? Are public issues addressed without partisanship? Are the poor, unborn, elderly, migrants, prisoners, and marginalized treated as bearers of God's image? Choose one concrete service or formation initiative.

Go Forth This Week

Give civil society honest service, give every neighbor reverence, and give God your whole life.

Prayer for the Week

Sovereign God, every authority exists beneath Your rule, and every human person bears Your image. Free me from political fear, contempt, and idolatry. Form my conscience through Scripture, prayer, reason, and the teaching of the Church. Give me wisdom to honor just authority, courage to resist injustice, and charity toward those with whom I disagree. May my words protect dignity, my choices serve the common good, and my public responsibilities become acts of discipleship. I give You what belongs to You: my mind, my conscience, my freedom, my work, my citizenship, and my whole life. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Emmaus Insight

The coin may bear Caesar's image, but the disciple bears God's image and therefore belongs wholly to Him.