

“Render unto Ceasar that which belongs to Ceasar, and to God that which belongs to God.”

It's not the answer the Pharisees were hoping for, as they hoped that in the presence of some government officials Jesus would decry the practice of paying taxes to support the foreign power that presently ruled Israel, and funding the soldiers who keep watch over them. They hoped that Jesus would reinforce their own belief, which they dared not utter publicly, that the Roman empire was evil and therefore they didn't need to support it. Because if Jesus had taken their bait, they could hand him over to the Romans and he would be their problem now – and the Romans aren't exactly tolerant of revolutionaries. Unfortunately for his questioners, Jesus isn't interested in overthrowing the Romans and reestablishing the great Jewish Kingdom of old from the glory days of Solomon. To him it doesn't matter what earthly kingdom you belong to: “Render unto Caesar that which belongs to Caesar.” If you are a part of an earthly kingdom, you need to be a part of that kingdom – not simply receive the benefits but support them as well. The Pax Romana, the free movement and roads and trade. Support the king and the king's works, whether you like them or not. We are now receiving ballots, and it's important

to participate in an informed way in our electoral processes. Or you can change kingdoms. But if you do, you are still expected to render unto that Ceasar, as well.

But Jesus didn't stop there. “Render unto Caesar that which belongs to Caesar, and to God that which belongs to God.” While it is true that we belong to an earthly kingdom and must be engaged as able, Jesus' greater vision for us is the Kingdom of Heaven, which begins here and now before welling up into eternal life, and which we also must be engaged in as able. We must likewise be in communion with the Jesus the King and supporting his works. Or choose not to live in his kingdom.

That is what the readings this past month have been about. Workers in the vineyard, as the Lord came again and

again and again to invite us in. The good son who actually worked in the family business despite his initial reluctance. The workers who tried to claim the vineyard as their own, mistreated and killed the servants and son, who were then themselves killed. The invited wedding guests who refused to come and were put to death, and the wedding crasher who was thrown out because he didn't don the wedding garment provided as he arrived to symbolize unity with the happy couple. It's God's kingdom, and we get to be a part of it in his goodness and love, and the richness that he blesses us with in this world– but on his terms, not ours, as faithful coworkers, faithful sons and daughters, rendering to God that which is God's (and to Ceasar that which is Ceasar's).

Kingdom living. It's just a question of which one. Thank you to those who have filled out their invitations and RSVPs, that is the time and talent pledge cards, as we strive to be faithful coworkers in the vineyard of the Lord

In Christ,

Fr. Matthew Oakland