Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



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"Whose image and inscription is this?" (Mark 12:16).

Tb 2:9-14; *Mk 12:13-17*

Jesus' famous words about giving to Caesar and to God have been the starting point for endless debates: separation of church and state, the obligation Christians have to civil society, tensions surrounding paying taxes to fund war, living in the world while keeping a spiritual focus; or just about the ethics of money. God or Caesar?

Just what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God?

The original question was a deliberate trap set by his opponents to get Jesus in trouble with either his Jewish followers who hated the Roman occupation or with the Roman authorities, always alert to potential troublemakers.

It was a clever ploy, but Jesus' response went much deeper than the political and religious dilemmas that defined life in Israel at the time.

Jesus asked to see the Roman coin used to pay taxes. It was readily produced by one of his critics, exposing their complicity in the system. Jesus' answer was simple: If you use the system, pay. But then he goes to the heart of the dilemma. By whose image do you define yourself? The image on the coin is that of Caesar, the supreme ruler of the world. Can this image supersede the essential image and likeness of God, creator of everything? It is this deeper imprint that determines who we are and why we are in the world. Even Caesar is subject to this absolute reality.

So go figure. We carry the dilemma into our daily lives and dealings. We benefit from all the interlocking secular systems that hold the world of commerce and civil society together. We belong to our banks as much as we do to our churches for the capacity to function. The challenge is to remember who we really are and to whom we must give an account.

The image we prize most will decide who we are and become. To bear the family resemblance of God is our ultimate reality and our guiding principle. Where there is a conflict, toss a coin. God is on both sides and owns everything.