

“What goes to Caesar and what goes to God?”

1. This is a perplexing statement of Jesus at the end of the Gospel passage today.

What is He talking about, we might ask? Could it be that He is saying ultimately nothing belongs to Caesar, and everything belongs to God? This is something I want to ponder today in this homily especially in relation to how we render the gift of **time** in our lives, particularly in relation to Mass and prayer. In the end everything belongs to God: *money, possessions, our talents, our life, and our time*. But isn't it the case that we often give more of these gifts to the service of the world (Caesar) than to God? Last week I talked a bit about the temptation to put our work/studies, hobbies, sports and other people above our relationship with God. If you remember: if we have our priorities straight God must be number 1, our relationships with family, friends, neighbors and co-workers number 2, and only after that comes work/studies, hobbies, etc. - which is to be in the service of the first two priorities and **NEVER** an end in and of itself.

2. How do we evaluate ourselves in this regard? As a general rule, Americans tend to be too busy with external activities. Let me just cite a few examples which is meant to help all of us to grow in our use of time, particularly in relation to God and His Church. *Do we find ourselves too busy to bring our families to confession on a regular basis - even if we would like to*. If this is the case, we need to reprioritize. Do we find ourselves in mortal sin and yet delay going to confession because we “are too busy.” Get to confession! Don't risk your eternal salvation! And if you don't know which sins are mortal look them up in the Catechism, or email me or just ask me in Confession. Do we make sure our children get to both **CCD and to Sunday Mass** every week once they make their first confession and first communion? And if there is a real conflict, do we realize that Mass takes precedence over CCD? - *it is a mortal sin to miss Sunday Mass without a good reason, it is not a mortal sin to miss CCD, although obviously I don't encourage that without a good reason*. And if our children go to Catholic school, we need to make sure they still get to Mass on Sunday. **Parents are the first teachers in the**

ways of Faith, for good or bad. Do we occasionally miss Mass on Sunday because we have to take the kids to a soccer game or swim meet, or a cheerleading competition, or because they had a sleepover at a friend's house and we don't want to spoil their fun by insisting they go to Mass? Is that putting God first in all honesty? Do we let our teenagers sometimes skip Mass because they were out late the night before, at a dance or some other activity and make the excuse "it only happens once in a while." Do we sometimes miss Mass because we didn't insist on changing or adjusting our work hours to make it happen - not always possible, but often something can be worked out if we make the effort. There are Saturday night Masses to help, and also if we are in a bind: there is a 5PM Mass each Sunday at St. John's Cathedral in Johnstown and the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Altoona. If we miss Mass on Sunday or a Holy Day of Obligation because it is impossible to get there because of **unforeseen** circumstances, do we go to Mass ASAP during the week, when we are off, and offer it for the missed Sunday/Holy Day Mass? Also do we adults make the effort and the sacrifices to attend Mass on the Holy Days e.g., All Saints Day very soon, and bring our children with us, even if we have to take them out of school for a bit and out of sports practice that evening, so they can come to Mass? God will bless that sacrifice abundantly, if you do so and don't just give into human respect/convenience! **Is God first in our life? Our consistent participation at Mass every Sunday and Holy day is a good sign that we are on the right track spiritually.** Or do we, young and old alike, sometimes put our convenience, our vacations, our activities, our sleep, etc. ahead of our worship of Him? **And if we have done this, do we realize that we need to go to Confession before we receive Jesus in Holy Communion?** We need to be honest and ask God to help us re-prioritize, to change in the ways we need to change, in order to put Him first. Some parents I know are now limiting their children to one extra-curricular activity to bring back some sanity to their families. Something to think about. Are we, and our families, too busy with "stuff", which in the end doesn't matter that much considering eternity? And remember God is never outdone in generosity, if only we give Him the best rather than the scraps of our life, as all the saints say.

3. **This is a battle for all of us.** To use our time wisely. It's easy as a priest to put work ahead of prayer; it's similar in your life as layperson. It's not that we are to neglect our daily duties in our vocation, but rather have things in right order. **Remember prayer always must be the foundation of our life - if our works of charity are to be spiritually fruitful.** Works for our neighbor however good they may seem, without the backing of sufficient prayer as the salt seasoning them, can become like an empty gong (1 Corth 13:1), as St. Paul says, because they become rooted in us rather than in God's charity. **We all have room to grow in this regard. We need to make significant time for daily prayer in order to do so.** It is so easy to render to Caesar, i.e., this world, the attention of our time, instead of God and serving others. Making the decision to re-prioritize is the first step, I hope this homily helps with that, but then to actually do it in our will and daily choices, we need the gift of God's grace, which is always there for the humble asking. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states (paragraph 2725): *Prayer is both a gift of grace and a determined response on our part. It always presupposes effort. The great figures of prayer of the Old Covenant before Christ, as well as the Mother of God, the saints and He Himself, all teach us this: **prayer is a battle.** Against whom? Against ourselves and against the wiles of the tempter (the devil) who does all he can to turn man away from prayer, away from union with God. **We pray as we live; we live as we pray.** May the Lord help us to render our time first to Him, instead of to Caesar, i.e., the world, and to change anything or any activity in our life or in the life of our family that prevents this from occurring on a consistent basis. The fruit of this sacrifice of more time devoted to God and living our Catholic faith more generously will be the peace and joy that the world cannot give and a beautiful integrated center to our life: *namely our relationship with God will be that core from which everything else in earthly life will flow in proper perspective for our spiritual good and for the spiritual good of all those around us - hopefully leading someday to the fullness of charity and joy and peace in Heaven.* God bless you.*