

Rev. Toan Do
Isaiah 45: 1, 4-6
First Thessalonians 1: 1-5b
Matthew 22: 15-21

**TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
EPIPHANY CATHOLIC CHURCH**

Louisville KY, USA
October 18, 2026

There was a line in the movie that I have watched a number of times called Meet Joe Black. There's one line I have not forgotten. I always remember death and taxes. As I looked up this phrase, most Americans do not know the origin or who started it, but for most Americans, at least adult Americans, those who work, even paying out of Social Security taxes, tax is something that is in our lives, in our DNA. It's something that is so common to us. But think about this another way. Supposedly, if the dollar of tax that we pay goes towards something, an institutional, invisible institution, that is not for someone of our own but for foreigners. Let us go back 250 years ago, when the US, the nation, was still under English colonial rule. England would come here, like many other parts of the world, to exploit and to extort the resources of the local people; place ourselves back with our ancestors, or among those who were always on their feet, ready to fight and drive them out.

Of course, we know world history reminds us that colonialism still happened until a few decades ago. Think of the indigenous people who tried to escape suppression or colonialism. If we can understand the aspect of paying tax to someone, to foreigners whom we don't have control over, and they tell us what to do, what would our hearts do? During the time of Jesus, paying tax to Caesar or to the Roman Empire is similar to us today, saying to ourselves, where are the taxes going? Who gets them, and how can we make that even? Of course, paying taxes in Jesus' time, unlike some of us today, can be very political. For this reason, the Pharisees used to pay taxes as something they did and tried to trap Jesus. This is a perfect example of how they tried to trap Jesus in speech. So, if Jesus supports the payment of the highly unpopular poll tax to Caesar, He will lose His standing with the people who have been His protection. If He rejects the payment, the Pharisees can go to the governor with the likely fatal accusation of complicity in rebellion against Rome. As we see, three decades after the death of Jesus, the Jews did just that. The result, we know, Roman soldiers came and destroyed them, crushed them, and not only did they kill so many of them, but also destroyed their very temple in which the conversation happened, according to Matthew. So, in a sense, Jesus

understood their hypocrisy, and He tried to unmask that hypocrisy by requiring them to show the coin used for tax. We know our time, here, that politics can be divisive, very divisive. In fact, a couple of months ago, before leading into this very period of our election season, all priests in the US, and as emphasized by Archbishop Shelton to all priests here in Louisville, all received a long document. I did share that document with our community on our website.

The document asked all priests to warn us against politics of the election. We should focus mainly and solely on the message of the gospel. In the gospel today, many want to interpret it politically; one can, because, in a sense, Jesus, being in that situation, did not deny the politics of His time. For Him, the more prudent way to get out of this trap was to allow the Pharisees and all those who listened to Him to give back to Caesar what belonged to Caesar. Namely, give back to politics of His time what belongs to the Roman Empire; to God, what belongs to God. As we also heard from our refrain, give God honor and glory that belong to God. Jesus understood well. Although He lived in a political world, subject to Roman authority, He Himself did not allow politics or the political society to influence His way of life.

His way of life was very simple. Give to God what belongs to God. I assume paying tax in Jesus' time was also very political. I also assume Pharisees, like the chief priests and the elders, and all adults in Jesus' time, paying tax to the Roman Empire, to Caesar, was something they did not want to do. They probably talked at home against that very act, but they themselves, in public, did not want to do that but wanted Jesus to get trapped in the politics of their time. Jesus, in a way, showed us a way. If the church in our own time mirrors and reflects the way of Jesus or the way of life, namely, our community here, should be, ought to be the place where all people of different opinions, of different political backgrounds and beliefs, can come here and worship One and the One alone, namely God.

Give politics back to politics and to society. But to God in this context, the honor and glory we have been entrusted to, we have been invited, give to the politics of our time, the politics of His own, but give to God in the context of this surrounding church, the honor and glory to God. Today, I have chosen the Eucharistic Prayer among one of the thirteen that are allowed by our church, the Eucharistic Prayer for various needs. There are three or four of them; the theme of one of them is that the church is on the path toward unity. Regardless of our political opinions during this time, we may talk about it at home; we may disagree with one another. We come here, as different as we are, undivided; as varying as we are in our way of thinking, we are here. We are gathering here to worship God; we are here to give God the glory and honor that belongs to God. If we learn anything from Jesus, and how He briefly but profoundly replied to the Pharisees who tried to trap Him, we

can learn from Jesus that, although each and all in His own time, each and all of His disciples have their own way and opinion, they follow Him; they follow Him toward the path of unity, namely God. God is the only One who can bring all different opinions, all diverse backgrounds into one, regardless of their backgrounds. If we learn anything in our community here during this time, during the next couple of weeks we all can follow Jesus. Similarly, saying to the Pharisees, give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar; to God, what belongs to God. We come here as one united. One group of different people, all people of different backgrounds, different social and political backgrounds, but all come here in unity, or at least, on the path to unity through our church, through our worship. We give God our honor and glory.