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Wednesday, December 1, 2010

Morning Psalms 50; 147:1-11
First Reading Isaiah 2:1-4
Second Reading 1 Thessalonians 2:13-20
Gospel Luke 20:19-26
Evening Psalms 53; 17

19 When the scribes and chief priests realized that he had told this parable against them, they wanted to lay hands on him at that very hour, but they feared the people. 20 So they watched him and sent spies who pretended to be honest, in order to trap him by what he said, so as to hand him over to the jurisdiction and authority of the governor. 21 So they asked him, 'Teacher, we know that you are right in what you say and teach, and you show deference to no one, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. 22 Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?' 23 But he perceived their craftiness and said to them, 24 'Show me a denarius. Whose head and whose title does it bear?' They said, 'The emperor's.' 25 He said to them, 'Then give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.' 26 And they were not able in the presence of the people to trap him by what he said; and being amazed by his answer, they became silent.

"...and to God what is God's." Luke 20: 25b

Their trap was slick, should we pay taxes to Caesar? Answering "yes", could turn the oppressed crowds against Jesus, saying "no" would be reported to Rome as promoting rebellion. Jesus asks for a coin. Isn't it interesting that those who posed the question had the coin in their pocket. "Whose picture's on it?" "Caesar." "The give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

The power of these words isn't in Jesus telling us to pay our taxes; it is in his call to give to God what is God's. You and I, made in God's image, belong exclusively to God. While we often want to "pigeon hole" our faith, there is not an area of life that is exempt from God's authority, no area outside his control.

As I write this the City of Pittsburgh is preparing to celebrate "Light Up Night." The official kickoff of the "Holiday Season," a commercial longing to use this time of the year to turn a profit, to grow and economy, to sell us the "stuff" we have been convinced we need.

Advent is different. It is about longing for the living Jesus to be alive in us. It is about giving to God, fully and completely, all that we are and all that we hope to be. It is about welcoming the Messiah into every nook and cranny of our being. It is about giving "to God what is God's."

Prayer: Acknowledging O God that all I am is a gift from you, I ask that you help me to live today fully and completely for you. In the name of Jesus I pray. Amen.