Pastoral Reflection from Justin Lorenz, October 18

In today's Gospel, the Pharisees and Herodians ask Jesus about whether it is lawful (under God) to pay taxes to Caesar. This question is posed not because they care about his answer, but because they want to trap Jesus into either admitting rebellion against the empire or putting him at odds with what was believed by the Jews in Palestine in those times.

Jesus, as we recall, responds by saying to "repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."

Jesus' response is not only diplomatic here, but it elevates the conversation to higher ground. Pope Francis, in one of his Angelus's on this Gospel reading, points out:

"Jesus responds calmly and takes advantage of the malicious question in order to teach an important lesson, rising above the polemics and the alliance of his adversaries…On the one hand, suggesting they return to the emperor what belongs to him, Jesus declares that paying tax is not an act of idolatry, but a legal obligation to the earthly authority; on the other — and it is here that Jesus presents the "thrust" of his response: recalling the primacy of God, he asks them to render to Him that which is His due as the Lord of the life and history of mankind.

"…Symbolically it makes them think about the other image that is imprinted on every man and woman: the image of God. He is the Lord of all, and we, who were created "in his image" belong to Him first and foremost. From the question posed to him by the Pharisees, Jesus draws a more radical and vital question for each of us, a question we can ask ourselves: to whom do I belong?"

It is God who has given us all we are and all we have. Jesus tells us to pay our gratitude to God, who has made us in His image, and to whom we all belong, above all else.

How does this identity go before all other ways we identify ourselves?