

# Sunday Homily

## 29<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

18 OCTOBER 2020

YEAR A

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK I

“Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar –  
and to God what belongs to God.”

### Illustration

On 6th July 1535, Thomas More, one of the most illustrious Englishmen of his day, stood at the foot of the scaffold on Tower Hill in London. He had been condemned to death for refusing to take the Oath of Supremacy, which would have been to acknowledge King Henry VIII as “only supreme head of the Church of England”. More was a scholar, the author of many learned books; a devoted public servant, chosen by Henry himself to be his Chancellor; a much-loved family man, deeply attached to wife and children, and anxious that his daughters should be educated far beyond the level usually available to women in those days: he was, as C.S. Lewis wrote of him, “a man before whom the best of us must stand uncovered”.

He had told the judges who condemned him that he prayed that he and they would “all meet merrily in heaven”; and even as he was mounting the rickety ladder to the scaffold, he retained his customary wit. “I pray, Lord Lieutenant,” he jested, “see me safe up, and for my coming down let me shift for myself.” Then, after a few words of encouragement to the assembled crowd, he declared that he was about to die as “the king’s good servant but God’s first”.

### Gospel Teaching

“The king’s good servant but God’s first”: those words might serve as a commentary on what our Lord says in today’s Gospel. Let’s recall the situation. Jesus has come up to Jerusalem for the last time; he has already been involved in controversy with the religious leaders. Finally the Pharisees decide to try to entrap him. They begin with honeyed words, intended no doubt to put him off his guard. In fact the Pharisees don’t come themselves but send some intermediaries, so it’s these intermediaries who use the honeyed words: “Master, we know that you are an honest man... and that you are not afraid of anyone.”

But after the compliments comes the barbed question, aimed to put Jesus in a no-win situation. “Tell us,” they enquire, “is it permissible to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” The tax involved, a kind of poll tax, was detested by the Jews on two counts: first because it was a painful reminder that they were a subject people; and second because the coinage in which it was paid bore the head of the Roman emperor and an inscription that proclaimed him to be divine. And so if Jesus