

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEACONS

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A
Can't Escape Taxes!

Deacon Mark Kelly

Jesus is not about to get sucked into an either/or dispute about civic duties vs duties to God. Though not in favour of the excessive taxation imposed by the Roman overlords, he has bigger issues to deal with. His whole purpose is to proclaim the Kingdom of God's love for all, hearing the cry of the poor, and working tirelessly to champion the cause of the destitute.

The Kingdom of God is a new deal for all but always Jesus seeks change by peaceful means, turning the other cheek to violence. Rather, by courage, strength, wit and wisdom (Matt 22:15-21) Jesus beats his enemies at their own game, bravely calling out their hypocritical attempt to wedge him on taxation. And he gives them something to think about and maybe shifts their hard hearts a little to his perspective. Rather than a choice between living in the real world and living religious practice and identity, Jesus answer is both! Caesar has a claim but, in any case, nothing really lies outside God's authority. God works through all human systems and institutions to build his Kingdom.

For us today, serving God's Kingdom and being good citizens in the community are usually not contradictory roles. Part of citizenship is paying taxes to the government to properly run the state and, even though taxation is sometimes spent in ways we disapprove, in our mostly benign pluralist democratic society we accept decisions and aspirations which are not our own. Jesus reminds us all in his response that we have dual responsibilities, first to God, but also to his people in wider society. Our taxes help address our responsibilities to our fellow citizens. On the occasions where we find our loyalties in conflict then, both as God's people and as tax paying citizens we do need to speak up courageously against Government neglect, omission, inequity or injustice.