

In 1985 the Kansas City Royals played the St. Louis Cardinals in the World Series. We have always had a rivalry with that ball club. I grew up in Kansas City, so I learned to support my home team. Before I came to St. Anthony's I served the Catholic parish in Cameron about an hour north of here. Several members there are St. Louis fans. One of them came to church one Sunday with his infant son dressed in Cardinals' gear. He said to me, "I'm starting him young, Father." I said, "Children rebel, you know."

We are all loyal to certain teams, products, and businesses. Even Jesus was. In today's gospel two groups check out his loyalty to taxes. Israelites like Jesus had to pay a Roman tax to support Herod Antipas, the governor appointed by Caesar. The Herodians probably supported this idea to maintain Roman rule. The Pharisees probably objected to it because they'd rather have Israelites in charge. Representatives from these two groups ask Jesus to settle the dispute - should they pay taxes to Caesar or no?

Jesus responds in two parts. He tells them to pay the tax. He felt no threat from the emperor. He could establish his kingdom in the hearts of his disciples; he needed no earthly throne. He was a loyal citizen. He makes this argument: the emperor owned the money. If he wants some of it back, you give it to him, just as you give back anything you've borrowed from your neighbor - a sweater, a saw, or a car.

Then Jesus adds this advice: You should also give God what belongs to God. What is that? It's everything. It's our life, our time, and our love. All of this comes from God and belongs to God. When we give it back to God in service to the church or in love of our neighbor, we are simply returning what God has allowed us to borrow.

This week the synod on the family in Rome released a preliminary statement on the deliberations that the bishops have had with Pope Francis. They are seeking ways to address a variety of concerns including couples who live together before marriage, children born outside of marriage, couples who divorce, homosexual couples, and families threatened by violence. The Catholic Church needs a way to reach out in compassion to the real situations that families face, while still honoring our traditional teachings about the sacrament of marriage. Every couple needs to give God what belongs to God. The Church should help them.

Sometimes people make sexual choices that are legal but not moral. Some people think the State is too liberal; others think the Church is too conservative. All of us are servants of the same God. Jesus held a coin in his hand that bore the image of Caesar. We are like coins that bear the image of God. All the decisions we make should give back to God what is God's.