

Missouri citizens are used to criticizing the condition of roads throughout our state. Now even Kansas politicians are complaining. Several months ago, Missouri voters had the chance to pass a new sales tax to benefit the state Department of Transportation. During the debate about the tax, Missouri Catholics felt caught in the middle. In general, a sales tax is not as just as an income tax. If you've got one family earning \$100,000 a year and another family earning \$25,000 a year, in general, it's fair to tax both those incomes. The percentage may be the same, but the totals are different, according to each one's means. But when the same two families fill their cars with gas, they have to pay the same sales tax. That hurts the poor family more than it hurts the richer one. Still, Missouri Catholics agreed with everyone else in the state that we needed better roads. In the end, the tax increase failed, not because people thought it was unfair to the poor but because people thought the state hadn't done enough with the last tax increase to improve roads.

We all have many responsibilities to our families, our state and our church. When the Pharisees and the Herodians come to Jesus in today's gospel, they try to trick him into naming the wrong responsibilities. They want him to say either, "Yes, pay taxes. The government deserves our allegiance." Or "No, don't pay taxes. The government deserves our resistance." Instead, he chooses another answer. "Yes, pay taxes, and also pay what you owe to God."

We have multiple allegiances. Sometimes these allegiances compete with one another, like our hopes for fair taxes and for good roads, or our desire for oil and for peace. Sometimes our allegiances support one another, like protecting our children and strengthening churches, or supporting our political leaders and exercising democratic rights. When the state is stable, Christians can live in peace with one another. When Christians of means help the poor, it builds a better state. Sometimes allegiances conflict, but more often than not they work together for the common good.

Whether we pay a tax, tithe to the church, give to charities, volunteer at the food pantry, baby-sit the grandchildren, bring communion to the homebound, help kids with homework, do the dishes or clean our room, we repay the state what belongs to the state, we repay the community what belongs to the community and we repay to God what belongs to God.