

Teach us, good Lord, to serve you as you deserve; to give and not to count the cost; to fight and not to heed the wounds; to toil and not to seek for rest; to labour and not to ask for any reward, save that of knowing that we do your will. – Saint Ignatius of Loyola

What is the true cost of tithing, or, how much should I give back to God, which I'm told is via the church? These are serious questions for small and large churches, and they are serious questions for us.

In today's Gospel Jesus isn't teaching in parables. He is giving a straight answer, albeit one that sidesteps the trap that was laid by some Pharisees. The question on where taxation money should go was a vexed one for the zealot movements, as well as established authority figures and organisations. No one liked paying tax in first century Palestine, unless it was to show the Empire how devoted you were to its ongoing existence. The flax-roots people didn't like it, and zealot movements (the ones who wanted to overthrow the oppressors) saw paying as collaboration, but not paying meaning incarceration or death. The people, who everyone wanted to win the hearts of, hated it. As we all do.

So, Jesus was stuck in a hard place, and I'm sure you have heard this story before. Give to Caesar what is Caesar's. It makes sense! Yet this is Saint Matthew recording Jesus' words, and as such, we are invited into a deeper spiritual understanding of this everyday experience of paying tax to whatever government we live under.

What does Jesus tell the Pharisees? What is it that amazed them and made them lose sleep that night, considering this Godly insight

and the joy it brings? What wider implication do we glean for our lives?

The implication is whatever belongs to God, is God's, and we should give back what it is His.

Everything that is, belongs to God. God created everything, God is in everything, you owe your life to God – give to God everything that is God's. Every waking moment, every dream, every breath. Every sip of water, every mouthful of food. Every joy, every despair, every conversation, every comfort, every suffering. Give it all back to God.

But I want us to consider this from a practical level though, because 'tithing' itself shouldn't be seen as a tax, but about how much the community needs to survive. This is truly what tithing is all about, and is the reason we as humans come together as wider units, as families, villages, towns, cities and nations – to pool resources and gain more value from them.

Yet from an individualistic point of view, there is a cost. What is that cost? Well, if may consider that tithing 10% is good. I'll be generous. If that is income, pay your tax first, consider it from your net income.

But don't wipe our brow just yet. What tithing to God should be based on is what God has given you. That should be ten percent of your life, that really means 2.4 hours, two hours 24 minutes a day.

That's easy for a Sunday, as by the time we are out the door, travel to church, worship, fellowship and begin the journey to the shops,

we might have almost achieved that, albeit with the need for a few minutes catch up as we arrived late. Pray then for a carpark space. But that is just Sunday! What about the rest of the week? Over five working days this equates to twelve hours – a typical labourer’s working day. If you work eight hour days, that is a day and a half. Everything you earn, every Monday (proactive) or Friday (procrastinators) belongs to God. But labourers worked the sixth day of the week too. So, nearly fourteen and a half hours that we give to the kingdom. It works out to be thirty percent - based on an eight hour ‘waged’ work day that we celebrate at Labour Weekend!

Now, one option is to simply pay up. My time is worth this, because, after I have given to Caesar, I will give thirty odd percent to the church and for God’s glory. But how many of us, are willing to give away thirty percent of our after tax wage? It may not be enough to pay the bills. Yet that thirty percent of your wage is ten percent of your life. You may want to consider giving time.

And time is so much more valuable to God. Because time in prayer, in conversations, in fellowship, in worship, in growing the kingdom is the true currency. Don’t get me wrong, money in the plate (or via through the Automatic Payment) to pay the bills is important too, otherwise you wouldn’t have had a fright at all of Monday’s earnings, or thirty percent of your post tax wage. Churches need to keep the lights on too.

So in our prayers, let us be thankful for what it is we give to God, to know how much God needs from us, and for the true purpose of tithing and giving, which is to give and reveal all glory to God.

Matthew 22:15-22 (NRSV from bible.oremus.org)

The Question about Paying Taxes 22:15 Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. ¹⁶So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, 'Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. ¹⁷Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?' ¹⁸But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, 'Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? ¹⁹Show me the coin used for the tax.' And they brought him a denarius. ²⁰Then he said to them, 'Whose head is this, and whose title?' ²¹They answered, 'The emperor's.' Then he said to them, 'Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.' ²²When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.