

Some background for today's Gospel may help us understand it a little better. One of the couple of taxes that the Jewish people were obligated to pay each year was the Temple tax. Every male Jew over 20 years old was required to pay what amounted to be about two days wages for the upkeep of the Temple. This included the daily sacrifices that were offered there, the incense used, and for the rabbis and priests who ministered at the Temple, etc.

With the collectors approaching Peter and asking for the tax, on the surface level it appears that Jesus and His disciples are in a bit of a bind. On the one hand, if they pay it without saying anything, the collectors assume that Jesus is an ordinary Jew. He is not God's Son, who like the king's son, is exempt from the Temple tax.

On the other hand, if He doesn't pay it, He might be associated with a religious sect at the time which refused to pay the tax because they believed that the Temple was profaned by the presence of the Romans. Many understood this tax as an obligation – one a good Jew always paid. Therefore, by refusing to pay the tax, Jesus' teaching would be greatly undermined.

Jesus, as usual, uses the challenge as an opportunity for a lesson for Peter and the disciples. He argues that if the king's subjects are free – those of His own household – then how much more free is Jesus who is the King of Kings and His subjects – His disciples? Strictly speaking, then, Jesus and His disciples are free from the tax.

However, because our Lord consistently subjects Himself to things He doesn't have to do – think of His own baptism, and later, His free subjection to the sufferings that He will endure – here, with the Temple tax, He again subjects Himself for the good of others. I'm not sure about you, but I find our Lord's humility truly inspiring. Pride is in no way associated with our Lord.

For us today, we can certainly learn from the Lord. Sometimes we are justified in continuing to argue our point or doing things our way. However, keep in mind it's a great act of humility and charity to concede the point. If there is no moral or religious principle at stake, then it's better to forgo what we want to build bridges with family members or opponents.

In short, may we have the attitude and mind of Jesus in things that are nonessential. If someone insists on their way, sometimes it's better to die to self for the sake of unity rather than cause division for trivial things. If Jesus was willing to give in to others rather than defend Himself for nonessential things, we should not do any less.