

AUGUST 11, 2025, FATHER GUSTAVE INEZA

“So that we may not offend them.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today’s Gospel passage is from Matthew, chapter 17, verses 22–27. It may seem at first glance like a strange interlude—a small conversation about the temple tax and a miracle involving a coin in a fish’s mouth. But if we read it closely, it holds profound wisdom for how Christians live under laws—especially imperfect and unjust ones—and how we navigate the tension between our rights and our responsibilities as followers of Jesus.

Jesus begins the passage by speaking once again of his coming passion. “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into human hands, and they will kill him.” These words hang in the air, heavy with sorrow and prophecy. But immediately after, we move into what seems a mundane issue: the payment of the temple tax.

The collectors approach Peter and ask, “Does your teacher not pay the temple tax?” Peter, caught off guard, says, “Yes.” And then Jesus draws him into a deeper lesson. Jesus makes it clear, as the Son of God, he should not be obligated to pay this tax. “From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tribute? From their children, or from others?” The answer is obvious: from others. Jesus, as the Son, is exempt.

And yet, he tells Peter, so that we may not offend them—so that we may not scandalize, confuse, or hurt the faith of others—go and pay it.

This is not compliance out of fear. It is compassion. It is an act of humility. It is solidarity. Jesus chooses to relinquish his privilege. Jesus surrenders a right that is genuinely his. He is exempt from the temple tax. And yet, he pays it.

Why? Not because he agrees with the system, but because he chooses not to place a stumbling block before others—especially the weak in faith, the confused, or the scandalized. He is thinking not of his own rights, but of those who might be hurt by what they do not understand.

This is a profound lesson for us—especially in our age, where so many insist on their rights and privileges without regard for the vulnerable. Jesus shows us a different path: the path of freely giving up privilege for the good of others.

But he also reveals something more—that sometimes, even in the face of unjust or imperfect systems, there is value in patience and solidarity. Jesus pays the tax not to affirm its fairness, but to join in the burdens that others, especially the poor, must bear. Most of those paying this temple tax had no choice. Jesus had a choice, and he used it to stand with them.

Obedience—not complicity.

This Gospel does not teach us blind obedience to all laws. Jesus himself was no stranger to defiance. He healed on the sabbath, touched the unclean, dined with sinners, and forgave sins—all of which brought him into conflict with legal authorities.

When laws were violent, exclusionary, or dehumanizing, he broke them. Think of how he refused to stone the woman caught in adultery. Think of how he overturned the tables in the temple. Jesus opposed laws that harmed the little ones.

But here, in the case of the temple tax, Jesus discerns that while the system is flawed, it is not inherently violent. It is burdensome, yes, and perhaps misapplied, but not destructive in the way that, say, the laws of Roman crucifixion or exclusionary purity codes were. So he obeys—not

because the law is good, but because disobedience here would do more harm to the weak than good.

There are laws we must obey out of solidarity, even if they are inconvenient or unjust in principle—especially when disobedience would make life harder for those already struggling. And there are laws we must break, with courage and publicly, when they actively wound, exclude, or kill.

So this is done for the sake of the little ones. Jesus' action teaches us to always consider the impact of our choices on those with less power. In our own lives, this might mean following regulations we find unfair—not because they are just, but because we want to show solidarity with those who suffer under them daily.

Think of immigrants navigating unfair immigration systems, or single mothers manoeuvring bureaucracy to receive aid, or marginalized communities targeted by structural inequity. If we benefit from privilege, the Gospel calls us not to wield it for self-protection, but to renounce it for the sake of others.

Christ's act in this passage reminds us: love is greater than liberty. True discipleship may mean letting go of our privileges to walk alongside those who have none—and doing so not out of legalism, but out of love.

Jesus, the one who is free, becomes a servant. The one who is exempt chooses to enter the burden. The one who holds all rights lays them down—not to affirm the system, but to show mercy to those who must live within it.

Let us remember that our rights, even if legitimate, are not more sacred than the consciences of the weak or the dignity of the poor.

May we be wise enough to discern when to obey and when to disobey—
and always, always to walk in solidarity with the little ones, so that we
may not offend them.

Amen.