

Time to take a look at ourselves

Next Saturday evening after the Vigil Mass we will as you know, be holding our Parish open meeting. Following on from the Week of Prayer, let us hope that it will be a successful and restorative experience and that we will take from it a renewed vision of what our Parish is and what it can become. I think that the weekend's gospel holds up a mirror for us to look into, and as we listen we should engage with the words of Jesus in the context of our own responsiveness to the call we have each received.

When Jesus responded to the Pharisees' request, he offered them a challenge which went beyond what their own expectations had been. They had wanted to fix Jesus on the horns of a dilemma; a dilemma which in their eyes set their duty to God against their duty in law, to Caesar. The answer they received unhinged them because Jesus, knowing their motives, was not going to become a pawn in their mind games. For Jesus duty to God was not to be measured on an "either or" basis. Duty to God could be neither compartmentalised nor juxtaposed with any human equivalent. Duty to God was the mantle which enwrapped the whole experience of life. By referring to *image* Jesus was clearly directing the listener's mind and thought to Genesis; *in his own image he made them, male and female he made them*. The trouble has been that ever since Genesis, we've been hell bent on trying to undo that truth and to reverse it. Well now's a good time to put a halt to that mindset, and look at our own selves and examine what we see.

We are all of us constantly struggling with the demands which our modern lifestyles throw at us. It's relentless and seemingly never ending - talk about work/life balance! The scales are certainly tipped too much on the work side as stress becomes endemic. The pressure to conform, the onus to achieve, it all adds up to burn out. Add to it the sheer ubiquity of social media that's *in yer face*, screaming at you and offering an image (*eikon*) of the perfect life which is totally unrealistic and unsustainable. – it's unashamed and should be unacceptable because it will lead ultimately to unhappiness and depression.

So how should we meet this challenge? *Give to God what belongs to God* may not a first sight seem overtly helpful. But if we look at how it is understood as Jesus himself sought to explain it, then here is a lifestyle, a way of living which doesn't abandon or discard what our own talents and skills have created or made. Here is a lifestyle which channels the energy and flair from them, into a gospel message that is itself enriching and life enhancing. This pool or resource into which we all contribute and from which we all partake and share is our parish, our community, and it is the image or *eikon* of our witness that we bring to God through our vocation as Christians. It may sound like a great ideal and be overly optimistic and it will remain just an ideal unless we allow this image of ourselves and of our parish to become fixed in our minds eye. Once we've done so and have seen the beauty and value of what is possible then we will work all the more to make it happen and bring it about. So let us set about making our parish the image of God's presence amongst us, let's make it our task to give to God what belongs to God and make his love the mantle which enwraps our Parish.