

Today's readings place before us two kingdoms.

The kingdom of this world.

And the kingdom of God.

And every Christian must decide which one truly has his heart.

In the Gospel, the enemies of Jesus try to trap Him.

They bring a coin and ask: **"Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"**

It is a clever trap.

If Jesus says yes, some people will accuse Him of supporting Roman oppression.

If He says no, He can be denounced to the authorities.

But Jesus sees through them immediately.

And then comes the astonishing answer:

"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

And that last part is the one that matters most.

What belongs to God?

Everything ultimately.

Especially the human soul.

Jesus asks for the coin.

And He says: "Whose image is this?"

"Caesar's."

So give the coin back to Caesar.

But humanity bears another image.

Not Caesar's image.

God's image.

Which means your soul belongs not to the state,
not to the world,
not even fully to yourself.

You belong to God.

And this is why the martyrs matter so much.

Today we remember Saints Marcellinus and Peter,
Roman martyrs from the early Church.

One a priest.
One an exorcist.

Both killed during the terrible persecutions under the Emperor Diocletian.

Rome demanded outward obedience to pagan worship.

Just burn incense.
Just offer sacrifice to the gods.
Just make a small compromise.

But the martyrs understood something clearly:
Caesar may govern earthly things,
but Caesar cannot possess the soul.

Only God can claim worship.

Only God is Lord.

And this is why the Roman Canon is so moving.

Every time the First Eucharistic Prayer is prayed at Mass, the Church still names these martyrs: **“Linus, Cletus, Clement... Marcellinus and Peter...”**

Their names have echoed through the Mass for over fifteen hundred years.

Empires rose and fell.
Kings disappeared.
Persecutions came and went.

And still at the altar the Church remembers them.

Why?

Because the martyrs reveal what the Mass truly is worth.

Modern people often imagine martyrdom as something dramatic but distant.

But martyrdom begins long before blood is shed.

It begins in fidelity.

Daily obedience.

Daily courage.

Daily refusal to belong to the world completely.

The martyrs first learned to say no to small compromises before they said no to emperors.

And perhaps that is where today's Gospel becomes uncomfortable for us.

Most modern Christians will probably never face Roman execution.

But we are constantly pressured to divide our loyalties.

To give part of ourselves to God,
while keeping another part for the spirit of the age.

To follow Christ publicly —
but privately keep certain sins untouched.

To appear Catholic —
but think exactly like the world.

And slowly the soul becomes divided.

But Christ does not ask merely for a corner of our lives.

He asks for the whole heart.

Because the image stamped upon your soul is not Caesar's.

It is God's.

Then St Peter in the first reading lifts our eyes toward eternity.

He says: **“What sort of people ought you to be?”**

The world around us will pass away.

Empires.
Money.
Politics.
Fashion.
Status.

All temporary.

And therefore Christians must live differently.

Not carelessly.
Not worldly.
Not spiritually asleep.

But growing in holiness.

Growing in grace.

Growing in readiness for the coming of Christ.

And the martyrs understood this perfectly.

The Roman Empire looked invincible.

But the martyrs knew something deeper:
Rome would pass away.

Christ would remain.

And history proved them right.

The persecutors became dust.

The Church still offers Mass.

The names of the martyrs are still spoken at the altar.

And Christ is still worshipped.

There is something deeply beautiful about that.

At every Mass, especially when the Roman Canon is used, the Church joins heaven and earth together.

The saints are not dead heroes from history.

They are alive in Christ.

Still praying for the Church.

Still worshipping before the throne of God.

And the Mass unites us with them.

Perhaps today we should ask ourselves honestly:

Whose image is shaping my life?

The world's?

Or Christ's?

Because every soul gradually becomes like whatever it worships.

If we worship power, comfort, pleasure, approval —
the soul becomes small and restless.

But if we worship God,
the soul becomes holy.

So today let us ask Saints Marcellinus and Peter to pray for us.

That we may remain faithful in small things and great things.

That we may never divide our hearts between Christ and the world.

And that when our names are spoken one day before the judgement seat of God,
we may belong entirely to Him whose image we bear.