

The readings for October 18, 2026:

First Reading: Isaiah 45:1-7

First Reading (Semi-cont.): Exodus 33:12-23

Psalm: Psalm 96:1-9 [10-13]

Psalm (Semi-cont.): Psalm 99

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Gospel: Matthew 22:15-22

This week's Gospel contains a saying of Jesus that is probably familiar: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22, verse 21). Even people who have never set foot inside a church are probably familiar with this saying, although they may attribute it to somebody else, like Shakespeare or Ronald Reagan.

I love how Jesus realizes that the Pharisees have set a trap for him, and he manages to avoid entanglement. This passage also shows Jesus reacting to the legalistic outlook of the spiritual leaders. He seems to tell us not to be so rigid in our formulas of our finances. We know what we must do. We have bills and obligations (among them, caring for the less fortunate); we cannot escape those worldly cares. But in figuring out our tithes and taxes, we should not lose sight of the larger spiritual picture.

God calls us to more than a rigid formula of living. Instead of dividing up our budget into rigid categories, we should always be on the lookout for ways to love each other. Some days/months/years, that love might be manifest in monetary ways. But in a way, just writing a check is much too easy. God calls us to be involved with each other's lives. That doesn't mean we need to hop on a plane to personally respond to every huge disaster. Look around – you'll see plenty of opportunities just outside your door.

What if you gave 10% of your time? There's 168 hours in a week. If you gave 17.8 hours to God, how would you need to change your life?

The reality is, that God wants and needs more from us than a mere 18 hours a week. God wants an ongoing relationship with each and every one of us. And that relationship should transform us to do the tough work of transforming creation, of creating the Kingdom of Heaven right here and now. That transformation, too, will come from relationships.

In these days of all sorts of insecurity, the message of Jesus seems more prescient than ever. If we save up our treasures on earth, moth or rust or inflation or deflation or bad policies or war or climate disruption or any other kind of ruin you want to name will leave us bankrupt.

The way we live our lives moves us closer to God or further away. If we devote our lives to God, our whole lives, not just an hour on Sunday, then we'll find a relationship that we can count on. And that relationship can help us transform not only ourselves, but our families, our communities, everyone we touch.