

Father John's Gospel Reflection



Gospel

GOSPEL – SUNDAY, 23rd October 2017

Twenty- Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Matt 22:15-21)

Give to Caesar the things that belong to Caesar and to God the things that are God's.

The Pharisees went away to work out between them how to trap Jesus in what he said. And they sent their disciples to him, together with the Herodians, to say, 'Master, we know that you are an honest man and teach the way of God in an honest way, and that you are not afraid of anyone, because a man's rank means nothing to you.

Tell us your opinion, then. Is it permissible to pay taxes to Caesar or not?' But Jesus was aware of their malice and replied, "You hypocrites! Why do you set this trap for me? Let me see the money you pay the tax with.'

They handed him a denarius and he said, 'Whose head is this? Whose name?' "Caesar's, they replied. He then said to them, "Very well, give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar – and to God what belongs to God.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection

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There is one thing that can unite enemies- it is sharing a common enemy. So, it was with the Pharisees and the Herodians, and Jesus as their common enemy.

They pose a question to Jesus about taxes. Well he can't win on this. If he says the taxes are lawful, he will offend the Pharisees and those who hate the imperial power of the occupying Romans; if he says no, the Herodians will report him to the Roman authorities. It is a well laid trap!

Of course, they butter-up Jesus with flattery, but Jesus is not fooled. His pockets are empty, so he asked his opponents for a coin, and they have no trouble in producing a denarius.

There have always been various interpretations on the answer Jesus gives (v20-21) Some say it is that politics and religion should not mix- that things like taxes have nothing to do with our theological commitments. Others say that religion is a matter of the heart, and that Jesus does not care about mundane things like money. Others read this passage as proof that Jesus taught that the law is the law, and our duty as Christians is to support the government, no matter what.

We already know of Jesus' attitude to money ("no one can serve two masters... you cannot serve God and wealth" 6:24) We have the coin of our realm with the image of the Queen, but each of us must never forget that although we contribute our money to the church and to charity, it is the image of God that should unequivocally be on our heart- we belong entirely to God. We are never to forget that we are to render to God the things that are God's- and that is us in our entirety!

1. We must be cautious that the accumulation of wealth does not override the responsibility we have to the care of others.
2. What we have is ultimately a gift to us from God; we should be grateful for what we have, and in thanksgiving to God, care for ALL of creation.
3. Jesus confronts his adversaries, and us with the unspoken question, "and you my friend; whose image do you bear?"

Take home Message