

October 22, 2023  
29th Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Matthew 22:15-21

The Pharisees went off and plotted how they might entrap Jesus in speech. They sent their disciples to him, with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are a truthful man and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. And you are not concerned with anyone's opinion, for you do not regard a person's status. Tell us, then, what is your opinion: Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?" Knowing their malice, Jesus said, "Why are you testing me, you hypocrites? Show me the coin that pays the census tax." Then they handed him the Roman coin. He said to them, "Whose image is this and whose inscription?" They replied, "Caesar's." At that he said to them, "Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."

### **Background:**

In the Gospels for the last three Sundays Jesus has addressed the chief priests and the elders of the people with parables. Three weeks ago, Jesus told the parable of the father who told his two sons to go and work in the vineyard. Two weeks ago, the Gospel told of Jesus addressing the elders with the parable of the landowner who had built a vineyard and entrusted its care to others but expected his share of the harvest. Last week Jesus again addressed the chief priests and the elders with the parable of a father who prepares a great wedding banquet for his son. Even though many invited guests do not come, the father invites the sinners and the outcast until the banquet is full. All three of the parables contain a criticism of the religious leaders for failing to be authentic leaders.

In response, those same religious leaders join with the Herodians in an effort to trap and discredit Jesus. Their effort to do so is our Gospel text for this Sunday.

Given that Jesus has been critical of the religious leadership of the day, it is no surprise that he would be challenged by them. But it is not the chief priests but rather the Pharisees and the Herodians who approach Jesus with a question that they hope will damage his credibility. The Pharisees, as a group, were tolerant of Roman rule, but would have rejected any claim of Caesar's divinity. The Herodians would have been supportive of Roman rule to preserve peace. Normally, these two groups did not share a common interest, but they came together to trap Jesus with their questions.

In response to their questions, Jesus asks them to show him the coin used to pay the temple tax. At that time, the coin was inscribed with the image of Emperor Tiberius and the inscription "Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus, high priest." The coin would have been the typical daily wage for laborers, and ordinary peasants would not have the luxury of carrying such wealth. To possess such a coin would have been an embarrassment to the Pharisees.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. How does your political tolerance affect your ability to hear God speaking through a politically charged Gospel passage?
2. Have there been times in your life when you took a public stand for or against a position? What was it about that situation that was compelling you to take a stand?
3. How do you feel about Jesus in the Gospel being caught in a political struggle?
4. In the Gospel, those who approach Jesus compliment him as a person who is not concerned with anyone's opinion. Where in the Gospels do you see examples of Jesus not being concerned with the opinions of others? Where is he also a person who is very much concerned with the opinions of others?
5. They also say of him that he is not concerned with a person's status. Where in the Gospels do you find examples of Jesus' disregard of a person's status? Are there also places where he seems to be concerned about the status of others?

6. Jesus told those who came questioning him to give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God. What do you possess that does not belong to God?
7. Can you take some time to talk with God about your desire to be a person who respects God and lives in the world today, or about your awareness of how the opinions of others affect what you say or don't say, or about some other awareness that arose in you from this Gospel?

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to [annemarie.lom@gmail.com](mailto:annemarie.lom@gmail.com)

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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### **Excerpts from the readings for October 22, 2023, the Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Thus says the Lord to his anointed, Cyrus, whose right hand I grasp, subduing nations before him, and making kings run in his service, opening doors before him and leaving the gates unbarred:  
For the sake of Jacob, my servant, of Israel, my chosen one,  
I have called you by your name, giving you a title, though you knew me not.  
I am the Lord and there is no other, there is no God besides me.  
It is I who arm you, though you know me not, so that toward the rising and the setting of the sun  
people may know that there is none besides me. I am the Lord, there is no other.

Give the Lord glory and honor.

Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all you lands.

Tell his glory among the nations; among all peoples, his wondrous deeds.

For great is the Lord and highly to be praised; awesome is he, beyond all gods.

For all the gods of the nations are things of naught, but the Lord made the heavens.

Give to the Lord, you families of nations, give to the Lord glory and praise;

give to the Lord the glory due his name! Bring gifts, and enter his courts.

Worship the Lord, in holy attire; tremble before him, all the earth;

say among the nations: The Lord is king, he governs the peoples with equity.

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians

in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: grace to you and peace.

We give thanks to God always for all of you, remembering you in our prayers,

unceasingly calling to mind your work of faith and labor of love and endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father, knowing, brothers and sisters loved by God, how you were chosen. For our Gospel did not come to you in word alone, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with much conviction.

The Pharisees went off and plotted how they might entrap Jesus in speech. They sent their disciples to him, with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are a truthful man and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. And you are not concerned with anyone's opinion, for you do not regard a person's status. Tell us, then, what is your opinion: Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?" Knowing their malice, Jesus said, "Why are you testing me, you hypocrites? Show me the coin that pays the census tax." Then they handed him the Roman coin. He said to them, "Whose image is this and whose inscription?" They replied, "Caesar's." He said to them, "Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."

### **Excerpts from Isaiah 45:1, 4-6; Psalm 96:1, 3-5, 7-10; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5; and Matthew 22:15-21**

Friends,

Here are the Gospel background and reflection questions for October 22nd, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. In the Gospel from Matthew, Jesus responds to those sent by the Pharisees to trap him. They ask, "Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?" Jesus says in reply, "Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God."

The other readings also affirm that God is the only God, above anything and anyone other, to be given his due. In the first reading from Isaiah, the Lord says, "I am the Lord. There is no other, no God besides me. I arm you, Cyrus, though you know me not, subduing nations before you, so all may know there is none besides me." Psalm 96 proclaims, "Give to the Lord glory and praise! Say among the nations: The Lord is king. For great is the Lord, awesome, beyond all gods." In the second reading, from the letter to the Thessalonians, Paul writes, "We give thanks to God, knowing our Gospel did not come to you in word alone, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit."

A second theme running through the readings is that of belonging, of being chosen. In the reading from Isaiah, the Lord says to Cyrus, "For the sake of Israel, my chosen one, I have called you by your name." In the psalm, "The Lord who made the heavens governs with equity." And Paul tells the Thessalonians, "We call to mind your faith, love, and hope before our God and Father, knowing how you were chosen."

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!