

October 18, 2020
29th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Matthew 22:15-21

1 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 a parable. Three weeks ago, Jesus told the parable of a father who told his two sons to go and work in the vineyard. Two weeks ago, it was the parable of a landowner who had built a vineyard and send his messengers to collect his share of the harvest. Last week, Jesus again addressed the chief priests and the leaders with the parable of the father who prepares a great wedding banquet for his son but the invited guests refuse to come, and one who does come is not properly attired. All three of the parables contain a criticism of the leaders as failing to be authentic leaders.

In the gospel text for this Sunday, Matthew presents the kind of opposition that Jesus encountered from the religious leaders of his day. Given that Jesus has been critical of religious leadership of the day, it comes as no surprise that he is now 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, at least as a way to preserve peace. These two groups did not normally have common interests. But here 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 this time, the coin was inscribed with the image of emperor Tiberius, and the inscription "Tiberius Caesar, Augustus, son of the divine Augustus, high priest." To have such a coin would have been an embarrassment to the Pharisees. Even if it was one of the Herodians who actually produced the coin, the fact that it reveals that the Pharisees have joined forces with them to try to entrap Jesus would have been humiliating.

Reflection Questions:

1. How does living in the weeks before a presidential election affect your ability to hear a gospel that contains some political argument?
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. In the gospel, those who approach Jesus compliment him for being 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 a person who is very much concerned with the opinions of others?
4. 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 very concerned about the status of others?
5. Jesus says, in verse , to give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God. What is it that does not belong to God?

6. Can you take some time to talk with God about your desire to be a person of peace and respect and a person who is committed to justice and respect for creation, or how the opinions of others affect what you say or don't say?

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

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 , , 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.

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Excerpts from Isaiah ;, -; Psalm ;, -, -; Thessalonians :-; and Matthew :-