

29th Sunday
10/18/20

A MATTER OF DISCIPLESHIP

Imagine two people, one very red politically and the other very blue. No imagine that the two of them approach you, in the presence of others, in church, and ask you about your political viewpoints. You would call that a trap.

Something similar happens in today's gospel which clearly describes this as a trap. Palestine was an occupied country governed by the Roman Empire. The Herodians were Jews who supported the occupation and the Pharisees opposed it. These two opposing groups now come together in a desire to trap Jesus. They call him teacher. In Matthew's gospel, anyone who calls Jesus, teacher, isn't a true disciple, isn't a true student of his.

Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not? If Jesus says no, the Herodians could say, "Ah-ha! You're not being obedient" and then they could charge him with treason. If Jesus says yes, the Pharisees could say, "Ah-ha! You're not being a good Jew and you are a traitor to your own people."

Jesus sees through this and as to use their words, *not concerned with anyone's opinion*, calls them hypocrites. The word hypocrite literally means an actor. It refers to those in whom there's a difference between what they say and what they do. They call him teacher, but they certainly don't regard him as any sort of a true teacher. They speak flattering words to him. They're hypocrites. Hypocrisy is an inconsistency between who one is and what one does. It can be easy to recognize—at least in other people. Sometimes we can do a very good job of finding it—in other people. And yet, it is important for us to recognize it in ourselves. Daily we can find inconsistencies between who we're called to be and who we are; between what we profess and what we do.

Hopefully these inconsistencies are small but to be made aware of the larger ones is itself a grace because it means we can change, we can improve, we can grow in conversion, we can strive, in the words of Matthew Kelly, to become the best version of ourselves. Jesus is critical of their hypocrisy and I imagine he is critical of our hypocrisy as well. The opposite of hypocrisy is authenticity which means genuine, literally, to do things oneself.

Show me the coin . . . then they handed him the Roman coin. A Roman coin was property of the emperor, it was a graven image that referred to the emperor in divine terms. That coin could be considered idolatrous and blasphemous and by the way, all this takes place in the temple, the most sacred spot of all Judaism. And yet they handed him the coin and that reveals their own hypocrisy. The image on the coin is that of Caesar and so Jesus says, *Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar.* He eludes the trap.

Now Jesus could have left it there and the story would have been complete but instead he takes it to the next level. *And to God what belongs to God.* Jesus shifts this from a trap and transforms it into a teaching moment, a matter of a discipleship. What belongs to God? We do. What do we give to God? Ourselves.

You could say, *We are God's coin.* An author of the early church noted: *The image of God is not impressed on gold, but on humanity. Caesar's coin is gold, God's coin is humanity.* The coin bearing the image of Caesar belonged to Caesar but we are made in the image and likeness of God and hence bear God's image. What does it mean to say we're made in the image and likeness of God? It doesn't mean God has ten fingers. It means that like God we have the ability to reason and to think and to know. But much more deeply, it means we have the ability to give ourselves to others, we have the ability to love. We're most like God in our ability to love, to truly love.

The Second Vatican Council taught that the human person is the only creature God made for its own sake and then by his Incarnation, by his taking on human life Jesus in one way, has united himself with every human person. Being made in the image and likeness of God means that there is a fundamental dignity to the human person, to human life—from conception to natural death and each and every stage in between: born or unborn, young or old, healthy or sick, guilty or guilty, black or white or any other race. This dignity calls for and even demands our respect for the human person because to disrespect the human person is to disrespect the handiwork of God. And there's a whole lot of disrespecting going on today in many different ways.

So more concretely, how do we give the coin of ourselves to God? We do it through love of God and neighbor and we will hear more about that next week so stay tuned. We do it by respecting others, even when we disagree with them. The world

today needs Christians and all people of good will to show this respect. We do it by promoting human dignity at every age and every stage. We do it through the sincere gift of ourselves whether in prayer, study or service to others. We do it through being faithful to our duties in life starting with family and then extending on to work, the marketplace, neighbors, city, state, country and world. Lovingly carrying out our responsibilities of daily life is one the most basic ways of growing in holiness. We do it through living lives of intentional faith where in big ways and in every little way, we do whatever we do for love of God. We do it by sharing the Eucharist where Jesus continues to make a gift of himself in love to us and where we work to do the same.

Let us ask for the grace to daily avoid the traps set before us, to daily leave behind hypocrisy in ourselves and to grow in authenticity. In love may. We give the coin of our lives, made in the image and likeness of God, to God who first loved us.