

Ordinary 29A - 2020

False Dichotomies

Let me ask you a few questions that I am sure you can answer:

Did you put on shoes this morning, or did you come to church in a car?

Do you eat cereal for breakfast, or don't you like football?

Are you Catholic, or do you live in America?

Will you obey God, or will you pay taxes to Caesar?

Welcome to the world of false dichotomies—things that are wrongly set against each other, "either/or"s that really aren't. Can you wear shoes and come to church in a car? Can you eat cereal and enjoy football? Can you be Catholic and live in America? Of course; in fact, you can be an American Catholic who wears shoes and eats cereal while enjoying football after you've traveled to and from church in a car.

None of these things are mutually exclusive. Beware of the one who asks such questions, because there may well be an agenda behind them. At the same time, rejoice! Such scheming is no match for the crucified and risen. (by Tim Pauls from [*Your Two-Kingdom Life*](#))

Richard Foster in his book *Money, Sex, and Power* has some very challenging things to say about money - that it is not a neutral object, but rather has the ability to inspire devotion (which makes it like a god in opposition to the one true God). The financial crisis in the world today seems to bear that out - I wonder how many there are who would say they don't need any more? Sometimes perhaps the Church gets no further in its thinking than the message for the individual - I believe now is a critical time for the Church to speak to the Nations of the world and encourage a new order to grow from the present mess. And perhaps that can happen as each individual is challenged to portray the Christian nature of that new order. Aren't we really on about building the Kingdom on earth?

A little tidbit... The line translated in the NRSV "you do not regard people with partiality" is literally "you don't pay attention to human countenance or face" in the Greek. Certainly Jesus hasn't shown their "faces" any deference in the preceding exchanges in Matthew. So the question is put to test whether Jesus would show any deference to Caesar. That Jesus responds by referring to the "image" on the coin affirms, indeed, that he is

not interested in showing deference in regard to countenances. But the real point, I think, is whether the Pharisees see whose image Jesus reflects, and through Jesus see any insight into whose image they bear in their souls. I'm thrown back, again, to seeing Jesus and to the challenge of self-reflection. That these "images" bear several levels of meaning in the story is part of the richness to be found in this very packed exchange.

John D. Rockefeller, Sr. drove himself hard to be a success. He became a millionaire by this age of twenty-three and by the age of fifty was the richest man on earth. Then at fifty-three years of age, Rockefeller developed a serious illness which caused the hair on his head, his eyebrows, and eyelashes to drop off. Even though he was the world's only billionaire and could have almost anything on earth he wanted, he could only digest milk and crackers. He became shrunken like a mummy. He could not sleep, would not smile, and nothing in life meant much to him at all. Doctors predicted that within a year he would be dead.

One night, however, as Rockefeller struggled to fall asleep he came to grips with his life. He realized that he could take nothing with him into the next world. The next day he embarked on a new way of living. Rather than hoarding his money and possessions, he began to give them away to persons in need. Establishing the Rockefeller Foundation, he channeled his fortune into hospitals, research, and mission work. His contributions eventually led to the discovery of penicillin as well as cures for malaria, tuberculosis, and diphtheria.

At age 53, Rockefeller was given a year to live. By learning to live by the principle of giving rather than getting, he altered his life so dramatically that he eventually lived to the ripe old age of ninety-eight.

For many people the worship of money and possessions is a profound and deadly spiritual problem. The more we have, the less we seem able to give. The more things we own, the greater the temptation to allow things to own us

"I have held many things in my hand, and have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands that I still possess." (by Martin Luther)