

Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time – A
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Mary, Queen of Peace Catholic Church
Sammamish, Washington
22 October 2023

Isaiah 45:1, 4-6
Psalm 96
1 Thessalonians 1:1-5b
(Philippians 2:15d, 16a) Matthew 22:15-21

Give to God What Belongs to God

Today's Gospel comes to us following three parables we've heard the past three Sundays, which Jesus has been teaching in the temple area: *The Parable of the Two Sons, the Parable of the Tenants, and the Parable of the Wedding Feast*.¹ And the Pharisees knew those parables were challenging them to change their hearts, attitudes, and actions.² And they didn't like it. And, I suppose, we all know something of what it's like to not like it so much when we're being corrected—whether by a family member, friend, or colleague—or whether by Jesus calling us to repentance and conversion of heart. On this occasion, for the Pharisees, their response to these parables was not self-reflection, pondering the meaning of Jesus' words, and conversion of heart. Rather, their response was to turn away and be closed off to Jesus' teaching: "The Pharisees went off and plotted how they might entrap [Jesus] in speech."³

We can remember back a few weeks ago, as this series of parables began, the scene for these past three weeks was set by the chief priests and elders questioning Jesus' authority. We didn't hear it in the Gospel that Sunday, but I preached about it in my homily. How Jesus was teaching in the temple area, and was approached by the chief priests and elders, asking Him: "By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority?"⁴

Jesus' response was to ask them about John the Baptist: "Where was John's baptism from? Was it of heavenly or of human origin?"⁵ Jesus was pointing them towards the content of John the Baptist's preaching: repentance and conversion. Yet, the religious leaders questioning Jesus felt entrapped by Jesus' question, because they had rejected John the Baptist's preaching.

Although, it wasn't really Jesus' question that entrapped them—it was their pride and unwillingness to accept the mercy and forgiveness that God freely offers to any person who repents and turns back to Him.

So, perhaps it's fitting that the Pharisees—who, by their own choice were feeling trapped—would attempt to inflict the same onto Jesus. This is a key principle of the spiritual life for us to take notice of. The wounds in us that we don't give to Jesus for healing to be redeemed and transformed—those are the same wounds we transmit to others.

But, whether *they* liked it or not—whether *we* like it or not—Jesus' words *are* the words of healing, redemption, and eternal life. We could turn away from them—we could ignore them—but then, where else would we go?⁶

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But Jesus didn't just dismiss the entrapment, He used it as an opportunity to reveal an important truth about each one of us. A first hearing of this Gospel might lead us to conclude that Jesus is creating a tidy separation between Church and state: “Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.”⁷

However, there is not really an equity between two separate kingdoms being expressed by Jesus. Not at all. And I'm not a divided person. One half of me isn't of the world and the other half of God. And I'm not sometimes of God and other times not. I'm an integrated person. I'm always a disciple of Jesus Christ—not just when I'm at church—but everywhere I go.

So, the key for us is to take another look at the end of today's Gospel: “[Give back]...to God what belongs to God.”⁸ Out of all the things that belong to God, what might we say *most* belongs to God? I guess, instead of *what*, we should say *who*? *We* do! By making this analogy of a coin stamped with the image of Caesar, Jesus was also highlighting the core truth about each

and every one of us as human beings. Like the coin stamped with the image of Caesar, we are also stamped with an image.⁹ Each and every human being is made—is “stamped”—in the image and likeness of God.¹⁰

With a coin, the image could be rubbed off or the metal melted down and the image erased. But, the image we are stamped with is not like that. It can *never* be removed. Therefore, no matter where we go, we *always* belong to God! You, me, and all of our neighbors. That can *never* change.

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The challenge for us as disciples is not to allow ourselves to be—or to feel like we are—entrapped in some way by the world. No, it’s not easy to navigate between what seems like two competing kingdoms. Yet, the words of the Gospel Acclamation give us encouragement, with the words of Saint Paul written to the Philippians: “Shine like lights in the world as you hold on to the word of life.”¹¹

The only way to make it through this world is to hold on to the Word of Life—that is, on to Jesus. Sometimes we get it a little mixed up by either putting the world first, or by treating the world as though it were separate from God. Yet, with all the energy, time, and attention we give to things of this world—how much more should we give energy, time, and attention to God? Give our thoughts, words, and actions more and more to God.

And give your neighbor to God, as well.¹² We must pray for one another—and in our prayers give one another to God. Pray for your family members, friends, neighbors, and coworkers. Pray for government leaders. Pray for your enemies. Pray that all of us will recognize more and more that we belong to God. Pray for ongoing repentance and conversion in our own hearts, and in the hearts of others.

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We've been working with The Evangelical Catholic for the past couple of years to help us get better at learning how to be a disciple in the world.¹³ How to navigate our lives as both a citizen of this world, and a citizen of Heaven. How to hold onto the Word of Life and shine the light of faith in the world. On Sunday and Monday night is our next opportunity to learn from a representative from EC with two important topics: How to Share Your Faith...and How *Not* to—and—"I'll Pray for You." *Now What?* to learn more about the power of intercessory prayer.

There are cards in the pew as well as a QR code to sign up. All for free! I hope to see you all there! Please welcome Mark Rose from EC to share with us more about our Mission Nights.

¹ See Gospels for 26th, 27th, and 28th Sundays in Ordinary Time – Year A (Matthew 21:28-32; 21:33-43; and 22:1-14).

² See Matthew 21:45-46: "When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they knew that he was speaking about them. And although they were attempting to arrest him, they feared the crowds, for they regarded him as a prophet."

³ Matthew 22:15

⁴ Matthew 21:23

⁵ Matthew 21:25

⁶ See John 6:68: "Simon Peter answered him, 'Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.'"

⁷ Matthew 22:21

⁸ Matthew 22:21

⁹ St. Hilary of Poitiers (310-367): "It behooves us also to render unto God the things that are His, namely, body, soul, and will. For Caesar's coin is in the gold, in which His image was portrayed, that is, God's coin, on which the Divine image is stamped; give therefore your money to Caesar, but preserve a conscience void of offence for God."

¹⁰ See Genesis 1:26-27: "Then God said: Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness. ... God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

¹¹ Philippians 2:15d, 16a

¹² See Matthew 22:36-40: "'Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?' He said to him, 'You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.'"

¹³ <https://evangelicalcatholic.org/>