

Twenty-Ninth Sunday of Ordinary Time
October 22, 2023
Year of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Ark of the New Covenant

*Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness . . .
(Genesis 1:26)*

As we begin our reflection, through the events in this passage, we find ourselves transported to Tuesday of Holy Week—the week of Jesus' Passion. This day, so far, Jesus has cursed a fig tree (Matthew 21:18-19), His authority has been questioned in the Temple (21:23-27), and He has delivered three parables (the two sons, the wicked tenants, and the wedding banquet). Now, He is, once again, being confronted by a group of disciples of the Pharisees. All together, a busy day, with more to come. It is the last of these we are focusing on today.

The group sent by the Pharisees includes some followers of the Roman Governor, Herod. This is an unlikely grouping of people, enemies all. On the one side, the Jewish oppressors (the Herodians) and on the other, the oppressed (disciples of the Jewish law-keepers). Normally these two could find no common ground. Today, we see the old adage in play—"the enemy of my enemy is my friend." The Pharisees have brought the group together to, again, lay a trap they have yet been able to spring. This trap involved two ways, either of which could bring down this man who has them all shaking in their sandals. The first way is "By Law." If they can catch Him defying the laws of the oppressors, the government will do their dirty work. Second, if He holds up the law of the oppressors, the oppressed will turn on Him. As we shall see, this will soon backfire.

After a malicious attempt at flattery, the trap is sprung: *Tell us then what you think . . .* (in effect, *For the record . . .*), *"Is it lawful . . ."* (not *Is it right* or *Is it good*)—"Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor or not?" But, they're not fast enough to catch Him. Jesus turns their "either/or" into "both/and." In His wisdom, Jesus sees through their attempt to entrap him tricks and, at once, calls them hypocrites.

Asking for and taking a coin of the realm, Jesus questions the image on the coin. Their reply to his inquiry opens the door for Jesus to further astound them. Looking closely, Jesus has cut them off. No further answer is needed. He can hand their coin back to them and walk away, but He continues, *"Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's and to God the things that are God's."*

Unsure of how to react to these words, . . . *they were amazed; and left him and went away.* In His wisdom He was able to carefully avoid their snare. We can surmise that in their amazement, they could have reconsidered and followed Him. No, they departed in confusion. Matthew Henry, in his commentary stated: "There are many in whose eyes Christ is marvelous, and yet not precious. They admire His wisdom, but will not be guided by it, His power, but will not submit to it." Instead, *they left.*

Let's tie all this together. To begin, Jesus did not tell the people not to pay the taxes. This is what Jesus told the crowd—*Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's . . .* St. Paul in his letter to the Romans offered it this way:

Pay to all what is due to them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due. (Romans 13:7)

What of the rest of Jesus' answer: . . . *and to God the things that are God's*. What is God's part in all this? Two points for our consideration. First, Jewish tradition provides "He is king of the country whose coin is carried in that country." Second, in the Book of Genesis we find the passage at the top of this handout. We all bear the image and likeness of God Our Father. The image on the emperor's coin provides the ownership of that coin and proclaims to whom it is to be returned. Just the same, as was previously stated, each of us bears the image and likeness of God within us, and by the same logic, we are to give ourselves over—body and soul—back to God. We can do this by 1) obeying God's commandments; 2) following the example of Jesus; and 3) heeding the teachings and traditions of Holy Mother Church. We must only look to the cross to understand what Christ did for each of us. This is our faith. This is our hope.

Mother Mary, in your wisdom, pray for us.