

Trinity XXIII

Philippians 3: 17-21 & Matthew 22: 15-22

November 3, 2024

The gospel this morning presents a strange alliance—an alliance designed to set a trap for Jesus, “entangle him in his talk,” and even persecute and kill him. The Pharisees and Herodians were certainly strange bedfellows. As they say, “The enemy of my enemy is my friend.” So, in order to understand what is going on in today’s gospel, we need to go back and get some background information.

The Herodians were a non-religious Jewish party that supported the power of Herod (hence their name: Herodians). They also supported the general ruling of the Roman government. They saw that the teaching and the influence of Jesus were antagonistic to their interests. Therefore, he must be put to silence. On the other hand, the Pharisees were members of an ancient Jewish sect who believed in the strict observance of oral traditions and the written Law of Moses. Even though they saw many miracles performed by Jesus and his ministry, they still did not believe that he was the Messiah. He was just an ordinary “Joe the Plumber” and must be eliminated.

Herodians and Pharisees were enemies before Jesus. But because Jesus threatened their views and power, they joined forces to try to destroy him. To do that, they set him up, they set a trap for him.

in Matthew 22 Jesus had just returned to Jerusalem for the final time and recently finished sharing several parables with the crowd. Jesus’ enemies saw an opportunity to put him on the spot in front of His followers. They say to Jesus, “Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” As you can see, it was a trick question, and they knew it. If Jesus answered, “No, don’t pay taxes to Caesar,” the Herodians would charge Him with treason against Rome. If He said, “Yes, go ahead and pay taxes to Caesar,” the Pharisees would accuse Him of being disloyal to the Jewish nation, and He would lose the support of the crowds. **To pay taxes or not to pay taxes?** The question was designed to catch Jesus.

Jesus gives a wonderful reply to their tricky question. “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and give to God what is God’s.”

Here is what Jesus is saying: What bears the image of Caesar belongs to him, and he needs to receive it. And we need to give to God what bears God’s image, it is you and me. This reminds us of the creation account, where God created humanity in his own image (Genesis 1: 27). Every human being bears the image of God. Therefore, we belong to God, including Caesar himself.

So here is the lesson for us.

There is a kingdom of this world, and Caesar holds power over it. But there is another kingdom, not of this world, and Jesus is King of that (John 18:36). We, Christians, are part of both kingdoms, at least temporarily. Under Caesar, we have certain obligations that involve material things, such as paying taxes and voting. Under Christ, we have other obligations that involve

things eternal. If Caesar demands money, give it to him. But make sure you also give God what He demands. Make sure to give God His due: “Offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness” (Romans 6:13).”

If the government, your job, your loyalty to a politician, or any human relationships demand your soul, say NO. Your soul belongs to God alone. In the end, our earthly citizenship will end, while our heavenly citizenship will last forever.

When it comes to things that are God’s, we can’t negotiate. Total and absolute loyalty and service is a debt that we owe to God and to God alone.

That is how we can render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and unto God what is God’s.

May the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds through faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord!

Prayer

DIRECT us, O Lord, in all our doings, with thy most gracious favor, and further us with thy continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in thee, we may glorify thy holy Name, and finally, by thy mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.