

Jesus says, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." (Matt 22: 21)

The religious leaders are once again attempting to trap Jesus. The Pharisees are the teachers of the Jewish Law and the Herodians are a Jewish political group who supported paying the Roman poll tax because they remained in power with the support of the Roman government. When they ask Jesus, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" The tax was a poll tax that everyone (whether free or slave), who was between the ages of 12-65 paid to Rome. The tax was a denarius, a full day's wages, per person. On the denarius of Jesus' day was the inscription, "Augustus Tiberius, son of the Divine Augustus." Augustus Tiberius, Son of God is what was on the Roman coin that was used to pay the Roman tax.

Jesus says to the Jewish authorities, "Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a denarius." Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" They answered, "The emperor's." Tiberius, as Caesar, considered himself divine and expected to be worshipped. Jesus tells the Jewish authorities, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's."

When Jesus overturned the moneychanger's tables, he was disrupting the commerce of the Temple. Jews had to exchange their Roman coinage for Temple coinage in order to fulfill their religious obligations for the Temple worship. Since the Roman coinage had the image of the emperor on it, the Roman coinage could not be used in the Temple. The moneychangers were also demanding an exorbitant exchange rate from the people, similar to the local payday loan places around here. So Jesus tells the Jewish authorities, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." The things that belong to the Roman state and bear the emperor's image belong to Tiberius. The things that bear the image of God belong to God.

What bears the image of God?

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Gen. 1:27) We are created in the image of God; *we* bear the image of God to the world.

One of our offertory sentences that may be used is, *All things come of Thee, O Lord, and of thy own have we given Thee.* Give to God the things that are God's. That would be ourselves.

But how difficult that is to do! I want to be in control, I know what I want to spend my money on and it's usually something that will benefit me or I think it will benefit me. Psalm 139 says, *For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.* (Ps 139: 13-14) We are God's. God created each of us. We owe God ourselves.

God created not only you, but also every human being on this planet. As our country is being torn apart by racism, bigotry, greed, anti-immigration, anything that promotes an 'us and them' mentality, we are reminded that according to scripture everyone is created and loved by God. There is no 'us and them'. If we truly are followers of Jesus Christ, then we are called to see God in everyone we meet, it maybe buried deep within some people, but everyone is created in the image of God. We are called by Christ to persevere in resisting evil in our world, which manifests itself in the idea that some people are better than others. In Jesus' day having wealth and the backing of Rome gave a person status and power in society. The Herodians that came with the Pharisees to question Jesus supported paying the poll tax to Rome because they received their power to govern Judea from the Roman government. The Herodians were secular Jews with social power.

There is no division between being a Christian and how we live our daily lives. We are to preach the gospel at all times and use words if necessary. Being a Christian is not just coming to a worship service on Sunday morning, thinking, I've done what I was supposed to do and then hearing a racist or homophobic statement on Monday and not addressing the evil that is right there in our presence! We are to proclaim by word and example the Good News of Jesus Christ! The Good News is that God loves everyone, no exceptions! A post showed up on my FB feed this week about Mother Teresa and how she perceived God in the world. The post was: "And when she wanted to see the face of God, she didn't look up and away, she looked into the eyes of the person next to her, which is much harder."

As long as we see cultural differences that divide us, wars continue.
As long as people desire control and power the fighting continues.
As long as we refuse to see the image of God in each other the violence continues. Jesus saw the image of God within each person. He saw the scars that the world leaves on each of us. But he knew that we are all one, that we all bear the image of God.

Richard Rohr recent post reminded me about Thomas Merton's epiphany at 4th & Walnut in Louisville, Ky. Thomas Merton was a Trappist monk and writer, he also worked ecumenically in the 1960s to break down barriers between diverse religions. He wrote:

"In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all these people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers.

It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world.... This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud.... And if only everybody could realize this!

But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun. "If only they could all see themselves as they really are. If only we could see each other that way all the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed...."¹

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Please open your prayer books to p. 292. (Renewal of Baptismal Vows)

Together let us rededicate our wills and all that we are to Christ.

¹ Richard Rohr: Daily Meditations online.