

The Twenty-Third Sunday after Trinity Sunday
St. Matthew 22:15-28
November 4th, 2018
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Whose Image?

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

We have been taught that when we pray, *“Give us this day our daily bread,”* we are not only asking for food, drink, clothing, shoes, house and home; but we are also asking for devout and faithful rulers and for good government. In other words, we pray that the Lord God order our days in His peace by raising up leaders who work not for themselves but for the greater good. And we ask Him to direct and dispose the hearts of all our judges and elected officials so they both punish wickedness and promote godly, moral living. For our goal is that we continually grow and mature in our life and faith in God so that, all those who believe on the Lord + Jesus may enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Our desire in this life is to gather for worship without fear, and to live free from the onslaught of immorality, ungodliness, and wickedness that is prevalent in this world. For these things do not only feed dissension and unrest and chaos; but more disastrously, they entice us away from the Lord God’s will and encourage us to gratify the sinful passions of our flesh.

Therefore, we pray and work for good government in our society. But not like the zealots who believe that we must revolt and overthrow and terrorize to get our way. Rather, we pray and work for good government, confident that our Lord holds all things in His hand and that His will is done on Earth as it is in Heaven, as we also pray in the Lord’s Prayer.

The Pharisees and Herodians in today’s Gospel from the Evangelist St. Matthew want to trap our Lord + Jesus into sounding like a zealot. For in those days, like today, the zealots were the ones who did not just gripe against the government. They tried to undermine it—both openly and in secret. And one method that all zealots use is the refusal to pay taxes. So then, the plotters against the Lord + Jesus ask Him, *“Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”* The Lord + Jesus perceives their wickedness. He knows they are not really interested in taxes or economics or government. No, they want to kill Him, and they are looking to trump up false charges against Him. Which is why the Pharisees bring the Herodians—the representatives of King Herod—so that they might bear witness to the Lord’s declaration against the government, and then they could have Him arrested. But, the Lord + Jesus gives them an answer that frustrates them and their plan. He says, *“Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”* In other words, obey God by obeying the government. For governments serve at God’s bidding and pleasure. All authority is established by the Lord God. Wicked governments are allowed to be in place to lead us into repentance. Good governments are allowed to be in place to encourage us in our faith towards God. Both kinds of

government—good and evil—are meant to draw us closer to our Lord God and trust in Him for all earthly things in this life.

This is what our Lord + Jesus teaches us, most plainly and clearly, with the answer He gives in today's Gospel. He tells us not to play God against the government. Rather, we are to *“submit ourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God.”* As St. Paul writes in his epistle to the Church at Rome.

Now, this is the obvious meaning to today's Gospel. But our Lord + Jesus is also teaching us something much more profound—something deeper than talk about governments and taxes; something much more significant about our life in God.

Before our Lord + Jesus utters His *“Render unto Caesar”* statement, He asks His detractors to show Him a coin for paying taxes. St. Matthew writes, *“So they brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, ‘Whose image and inscription is this?’”*

With these words, our Lord is not asking a belittling question. It is not as if He is saying, “Look at the coin. Any child can tell you whose face is on the coin. And any one of you can figure out who you pay taxes to if you are going to use that coin.” Rather, our Lord is urging us to look beyond the money, beyond the lesson on taxes, beyond our worries and fretting about finances and economics. He is urging us to consider the image and inscription—not just on a coin, but also on us.

The coin bears the image of Caesar, because the material things of this world must be governed by some kind of government. Our money bears the image—the symbols and images—of various Presidents and buildings. These remind us that our material things are protected and governed by our United States of America—by the President and Congress, the Governor and Legislature of this state of South Carolina, our judges, magistrates and all in authority—as we pray in the General Prayer every Sunday.

But we are also a coin—the coin of the Lord God. For we bear the image of the Triune God. In the beginning, before creating man, *“God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.’ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him.”* And so, we are made by the Lord God to reflect Him—His care, His love, His mercy, His protection—to all men, and even to all creation. We are made in the image and likeness of God; so it is His perfect and holy image that we bear through the faith given to us by the Holy Ghost in the waters of Holy Baptism, and nurtured through our continual participation in the means of grace.

Yet that image has been marred and corrupted through sin—through the evils we participate in when we feed our passions, and through the evils we inherited through our first father Adam. Yes, we inherited a sinful nature, but this image of God we also have had a hand in corrupting every time we commit sins, or fail to do the tenets of the Commandments. Yet our Lord in His mercy still sees His image upon us through our faith in the Lord + Jesus Christ, Whose merits and works—whose righteousness—we bear through the gift given to us in Holy Baptism. And so, He lovingly claims us as His own on account of the obedience and self-sacrifice of His Son + Jesus, and then—even more personally— He claims us as His children in the waters of Holy Baptism. There our Lord inscribes on us His Holy Name. There He calls us His own. There He invites us to live no longer for ourselves, but for Him. And there He calls us to love Him with all that we are and all that we have; and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

“Whose image and inscription is this?” That is what our Lord says when looking at the coin. But with those words, our Lord is also urging us to see whose image and inscription we bear. For the image

of God is not depicted on gold, but on men. Worldly rule, power and concerns for our daily welfare are manifest in money. The Lord God, however, is known through His Word written on the hearts of man; who live out that Word written on their hearts by exhibiting the faith and life that they have in the Triune Lord God through their daily righteous lives. And you—by His creating hand and by His life-renewing Spirit—you have His image restored within you, and His inscription written on your soul whenever we believe and cling to His promises.

Since you bear God's image; since His inscription has been written on your heart and mind, there is no need to worry about what you will eat or what you will drink or what you will wear. Neither is there any need to fear how your life will go. For your heavenly Father certainly cares for you, and gives you all you need to support your body and life—just as you ask Him to when you pray several times daily, *"Give us this day our daily bread."*

Therefore, as our nation is concerned about who to elect for government positions this week, set your mind not only on earthly things—the things that money buys and who is in charge of that money. Instead, remember to set your mind on heavenly things. For, just as St. Paul wrote to the Church at Philippi, *"our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord + Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself;"* to whom, with His Father in the Spirit, belongs all glory, honor and worship now and forever. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!