

The Twenty-Third Sunday after Trinity Sunday
St. Matthew 22:15-22
November 3rd, 2024
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
St. Michael and All Angels Ev. Lutheran Mission, UAC
Augusta, GA
Pastor Jerald Dulas

What Thinkest Thou?

In Nomine Iesu!

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

Sermon Text:

“Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might ensnare Him in His talk. And they send to Him their disciples, with the Herodians, saying, ‘Teacher, we know that Thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, and carest not for anyone: for Thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?’”

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord Almighty God, Who dost establish and sustain all civil authority, and desirest us to render unto it and unto Thee our several dues, we beseech Thee, Thou wouldst bless and protect our government and all magistrates everywhere, and by this means secure peace and quietness for Thy holy Word and Church, that we may daily increase in true knowledge and all godliness, and in the end obtain everlasting peace; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

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

My dear friends, often, when this text comes around in the Church’s year, many parishes turn this Sunday into what they call a “Stewardship Sunday.” It is reason for the parish to have their own “pledge drive” and hit people up for money. Afterall, one must “render to Caesar those things that are Caesar’s.” When I was a child, it seemed to me that we had one of these Sundays at least once a year. Usually around the time when the parish was planning the budget. They needed to get an accurate count of what to expect from people regarding the following year’s offerings. This text, among some others, would serve as the theme of the day. But to make this Gospel reading from the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew about stewardship, misses the point of this text.

The Jews had been promised by the Lord God that when they entered into the Promised Land of Canaan, that they would be a free people, subject to no one, if they remained faithful to the Lord God. As we know from our biblical history, they did not remain faithful to the Lord God and the Northern Kingdom was exiled into Assyria, and the Southern Kingdom was exiled into Babylon. Fast forward a few centuries, and it was not the Romans who controlled the region in which the Jews lived. On account of their rebellion and rejection of the Lord God, they were subject to the Romans, and therefore, had to pay them taxes.

That the Jews had not only rejected the Lord God, but also rejected the Son of God, the Lord + Jesus was portrayed to us a few weeks ago when we had the first part of chapter twenty-two where we

heard about the King who gave a wedding banquet for His Son, and the ones invited refused to come. The Jews perceiving correctly that this parable was spoken against them, went into secret council on how to trick the Lord + Jesus in order that He might bring shame upon Himself. They send unto Him spies, that is, people who pretend to be congenial, but in their hearts, they are really wicked. St. Matthew tells us that they had brought along the Herodians. This is an important detail, for the Herodians represented the government.

The test basically went this way: if the Lord + Jesus answered their question about taxes by saying that one did not need to pay the taxes, the Herodians who were there would have cause to bring Him up on charges of insurrection against the government. Despite our Lord's answer, the scribes and Pharisees tried to level this charge against Him when He was before Pontius Pilate. This was the first part of the test. The second part was if the Lord had said that the people should pay taxes to Caesar, then the people would reject the Lord + Jesus, because they believed that they were a free people, subject to no one.

This is the true issue with this question: Who are we to serve, God or man? Do we serve man with our taxes, or do we serve the Lord God by not paying taxes? This question reveals the wickedness of the persons asking, as our text says. They condemn themselves even further by telling the Lord that they knew He was true and taught the way of the Lord God in truth. If this true, why the deception and trickery to trip the Lord + Jesus up in His teaching. Why test Him if you know that what He teaches is true? The truth is that they believe Him to be the Messiah, but they just do not care. They hate Him because of envy—jealousy—and they need to get rid of Him so the people will listen to them once again. Envy and hatred, however, cannot be satisfied. Their jealousy and loathing will burn within them until they get rid of Him. By asking this question of the Lord they pass judgment on themselves for even though they knew Him to be the Lord, they rejected Him. Just as the Jews had done throughout their history.

Here they believe they have constructed the perfect question in order to trip up the Lord. But as St. Matthew says, the Lord + Jesus saw through to their wicked hearts. He puts the onus back on the disciples of the Pharisees and the Herodians. He says, "Shew me the tribute money." Our Lord's answer proceeds from a genuine and understanding heart, for He first asks them a question and then judges them by their own response. "Whose is this image and superscription?" "Render therefore unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's." Since they used Caesar's coin, the Lord concludes that they are subservient to Caesar and should pay him tribute. Of course, my dear friends, our Lord also shows that such subservience, within proper limits, does not hinder the worship of the Lord God. For a person can both give to the Lord God what is His and to Caesar what is Caesar's.

This answer left the questioners in shame and embarrassment, and they went their way marvelling at His answer. By the end of this chapter the Lord will silence both the Sadducees and the Pharisees, so that no one dared ask Him any more questions. We must remember that this Gospel takes place during Holy Week. The Lord has already entered into Jerusalem to the shouts of the crowds on Palm Sunday in chapter twenty-one. They religious leaders, who on account of jealousy wish the Lord + Jesus to be gone, are brought to silence. It is not until Judas Iscariot betrays our Lord to them for the promise of money, that they are able to put Him to sham trial, and bring Him to the cross.

Therefore, my dear friends, we serve can serve man with the things of mankind. All authority on earth has been established by the Lord God. As St. Paul writes to the Church at Rome in the thirteenth chapter, we honor the government, just as we do our parents and other authorities in obedience to the fourth Commandment. "For for this cause ye pay tribute also; for they are ministers of God's service, attending continually upon this very thing. Render to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour." For in doing so we are ultimately not placing ourselves under the authority of the earthly government, but under the authority of the Lord God

Who has established earthly government.

We do this remembering that as St. Paul wrote to the Church at Philippi in the Epistle for today “our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we wait for a Savior, the Lord + Jesus Christ.” To Him we render the things of the Lord God. Unlike the Pharisees who tested the Lord and rejected Him out of envy and hatred, we instead show love for our Lord and Savior. We subject ourselves to His Law and will—to His Commandments. We worship Him by receiving the gifts He gives to us here in the place: His holy Word, and His Blessed Sacraments. We cling to Him in faith, trusting Him to give us all good things, especially when the earthly powers that be cause us great lamentation.

He is over the earthly governments, and restrains them from harming us thoroughly. But He also allows them to lead us into repentance, so that we learn to trust fully in Him, and not place any trust in kings or princes, or presidents who will pass away through the votes of mankind.

It is for us and for our nation that we also render to the Lord God, not only our faith in Him to see us through hard times, but also render unto Him our prayers. Let us pray therefore, my dear friends, that the Lord God might strengthen our faith through these gifts that we receive from Him. For through faith, we learn to cling to Him and regard Him as the ruler of all authority, who will bring down the prideful and haughty leaders, and establish an authority that does what we pray for every Divine Service, to maintain righteousness, and hinder and punish wickedness, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty. May the Lord God Almighty grant this unto us all. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

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

Soli Deo Gloria!