

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON (or a hymn) To you I call; for you will surely heed me, O God; turn your ear to me; hear my words. Guard me as the apple of your eye; in the shadow of your wings protect me.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (Ps 95)

ANTIPHON: Give the Lord glory and honour.

RESPONSE: Give the Lord glory and honour.

LECTOR: O sing a new song to the Lord, sing to the Lord all the earth. Tell among the nations his glory and his wonders among all the peoples. **R.**

LECTOR: The Lord is great and worthy of praise, to be feared above all gods; the gods of the heathens are naught. It was the Lord who made the heavens. **R.**

LECTOR: Give the Lord, you families of peoples, give the Lord glory and power, give the Lord the glory of his name. Bring an offering and enter his courts. **R.**

LECTOR: Worship the Lord in his temple. O earth, tremble before him. Proclaim to the nations: "God is king." He will judge the peoples in fairness. **R.**

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION Alleluia, alleluia! Shine on the world like bright stars; you are offering it the word of life. Alleluia!

COMMUNION ANTIPHON (or a hymn) Behold, the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, who hope in his merciful love, to rescue their souls from death, to keep them alive in famine.

Or

The Son of Man has come to give his life as a ransom for many.

TODAY'S READINGS Isaiah 45:1, 4-6; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5; Matthew 22:15-21

NEXT WEEK (30th Sunday of Year A) Exodus 22:20-26; Ps 17; 1 Thess 1:5-10; Matthew 22:34-40-14

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Avoiding a tricky question



October 22 2023 29th Sunday Year A

The gospels are full of great stories; and this Sunday's extract is no exception. It all hinges on a "trick question". The Pharisees and Herodians attempt to tempt Jesus into committing a political faux pas.

The question they put to him – "is it lawful to pay the Census tax to Caesar or not?" – permits no "safe" answer. If Jesus answers "Yes, you should pay the tax," he could be condemned as a collaborator with the hated Roman occupation. If, however, he advocated that people avoid the tax, he could be denounced as anti-Roman.

Tax revolts against Rome were common. A large-scale one had taken place during Jesus' boyhood and had been crushed with typical Roman brutality.

Ironically, the Pharisees were not normally known for their cooperation with either the imperial authorities or their aristocratic collaborators. Yet they joined forces with the supporters of Herod against Jesus.

Jesus evades the question by posing his own riddle. He asks to see the coin that was used to pay the tax; most likely, the silver denarius of Tiberius. The denarius bears an idolatrous image of the Emperor Tiberius with the confronting inscription 'Tiberius Caesar, son of the Divine Augustus.'

The coin related to the pagan imperial cult in the East Empire and represented an affront to Jewish religious and political sensibilities. The ancient Jewish historian, Josephus proudly proclaimed that the Jewish citizens of

Jerusalem preferred death to allowing Caesar's image to enter Jerusalem on standards (Antiquities of the Jews, 18.59). Yet Jesus finds some of Jerusalem's most respected citizens had the idolatrous images of Caesar.

Jesus asks, "Whose image is this and whose inscription?" When his opponents reply, "Caesar's," Jesus tells them to "repay to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what belongs to God."

By asking his interlocutors to produce the coin, Jesus forces them to admit that they kept such idolatrous objects on their person. Jesus is not advocating what today we would call "the separation of Church and State." Rather, Jesus is suggesting that Caesar's regime was a blasphemous nonsense, which God would one day overthrow and replace with a new kingdom.

Jesus' words remind us of those of an earlier Jewish revolutionary, Mattathias, who told his sons "Pay back to the Gentiles what is due to them and keep the law's commands" (1 Mc 2:68). Neither Jesus nor Mattathias were talking about money, but about personal integrity and fidelity.

The lesson here is that we shouldn't allow ourselves to be tricked into thinking that any political party or regime can bring about justice and peace. A truly just society is one aligned to God which we have yet to achieve. So, until the kingdom comes, we are called to engage in the social and political realms as critics and agents for change, champions of justice and seekers for peace.

Ian J Elmer

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