

Again the Pharisees are on the attack

But today, not just them

They gang up with 2 other groups

The Herodians and the Sadducees

3 groups diametrically opposed to each other in society and in religious beliefs

The Pharisees

Those governed by the law

Believing the law could and would offer salvation

If we keep the law perfectly

God owes us salvation

The Sadducees

They did not believe in an after life

This world was all there was to life

After you died

Nothing

And the Herodians

These were Jewish citizens that supported the Roman occupiers

They turned their back on the Israelite nation

To get ahead materially

Many of these would be tax collectors or otherwise employed by the government

But they come together in our Gospel

United in their opposition to Jesus Christ

But God will use them to teach an important lesson

Just as He has always done

In our first reading from Isaiah

The Babylonians had captured the Israelite nation

They took them into captivity and from Jerusalem

Years later, the Babylonians are defeated by the Persians

Cyrus became the new ruler

God 'anoints' him, something normally reserved for David and his descendants

But he is not Jewish

He may not even have known God

Yet he is chosen by God

Given special protection, power and authority

He does this so Cyrus can conquer kings and peoples

For the sake of Jacob

For God's chosen people

And Cyrus opens doors that allow the Jewish people to return home

God would use unwitting accomplices to teach another lesson as well

The three groups come together for one purpose

To trip up Jesus

The begin with false praise

Flattery

We know you are a truthful man

You are not concerned with anyone's opinion

Just the opposite of those trying to entrap him

They are not trustworthy

And all they care about is the opinion of the crowd

They came up with this plan

Tell us about the Roman Tax

Is it just?

Is it lawful?

They try to get Jesus into an either / or situation

If he says the tax is legit

His biggest supporters will turn on him

Their main concern was having their land occupied by the Romans

They were waiting for a messiah who would free Israel

A messiah who would be a return of Davidic power

But if he says no to the tax

Then those supporting Rome will turn him in as a political traitor

Something the Roman authorities would not stand for

Denouncing Cesar was punished by death

But Jesus does not fall for their false praise

Nor does he give into their trap

He responds with a question of his own

Why are you testing me, you hypocrites?

Show me the coin used for the tax

Whose image and whose inscription are on the coin?

Cesar's

Then repay to Cesar what is Cesar's

And repay to God what is God's

Jesus gives us a new way to look at our world

Two things seemingly diametrically opposed to each other

Another way for those of Jesus' time to see as us vrs them

God's chosen people and the others

Again, this shows that Jesus did not come for only a select group

He came for the salvation of all

All people live under one form of government or another

But more fundamentally, all people are made in the image and likeness of God

To whom do we owe a higher degree of allegiance?

Governments and worldly powers may take everything we have

Except what truly matters

Our hearts and our souls

Why is it that we so like to denigrate our opponents?

In all things, right?

Business, sports, politics

**I don't know if there is a sphere of our lives where this doesn't
come into play**

At least a little bit

We see it especially every election cycle

Watching the ads on TV

You would think this or that person is the devil incarnate

Until the next ad comes on

Showing they are really an angel in disguise

And their opponent is Satan

We can give false praise and adulation

Only in order to bring them down a notch or two

Because then we can feel a bit better about ourselves

But in reality we should pay attention to Jesus' last words

Repay to God what belongs to God

We are made in the image and likeness of God

Our relationships here on earth should reflect this

How we treat our families and friends

How we treat strangers we encounter

How we live our spiritual lives

How we handle our money should reflect this

How we spend our leisure time should reflect this

How we vote should reflect this

And ultimately, this has an impact on what we celebrate today

World Mission Sunday

It is said that the Church does not have a mission

The mission of Christ

Taking the Gospel to the entire earth

This mission has a church

It is a mission that goes beyond national borders

It is a mission that goes beyond personal prejudices

It is a mission we are all called to invest in and support

For some, that means physically going to places in need

It used to mean going to the far corners of the world

While that is still true, it goes beyond that

Our own nation is in need

In the cities and in our local communities

While we now have group leaders for our next Confirmation class

Why is it that it took so long?

Why is it that we have the same men ushering for a month at a time?

Why is it we have such a small group of lectors?

Why is it that our CCD program doesn't have a group of teachers in the wings?

Why is it that the same people run the fall fest and bazaar year after year?

Why is it that getting another body on one of the parish councils is like pulling teeth?

Supporting the mission financially is important

And we will have a collection for this next week

But supporting the mission right here at home is no less important

In fact, I would say it is even more important

Because a lively, vibrant local community

Is the source of a vibrant diocese

This is the source of a vibrant Church, of a vibrant mission

Around the world

And here at home

Render unto Cesar what is Cesar's

And render unto God what belongs to God