



ST. PATRICK'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

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The 23rd Sunday in Trinity November 15, 2020
**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son
 and of The Holy Ghost. Amen.**

The passage selected for the sermon this morning is taken from the Gospel:

“Then saith He unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are Gods.” St. Matthew 22:21

We have all heard this encounter many times. The Pharisees are hoping to trap Jesus, and they think they have a foolproof plan. If Jesus said the taxes should be paid, they would cast him as a sympathizer with the Roman occupation and discredit Him to the Jews. If, on the other hand, Jesus suggested the tax should not be paid, He would be turned over to the Romans and tried for sedition.

Jesus turns the tables on them in several ways. First, He answers in such a way that he avoids their trap, and frustrates their plan. Second, He gives us a lesson on our duties to both God and to those earthly rulers that have temporal authority, whether we think their authority is moral or not. Finally, by asking the Pharisees to look at the coins in their own pockets, Jesus reveals them to be hypocrites and, literally, idolaters. The coins they show bear Caesar’s image. Since the Roman leaders considered themselves gods, simply carrying the money violated the first and second commandments.

While it is certainly interesting to see how Jesus confounds His adversaries, it is also true that in some ways, Jesus has confounded all of us with His answer. As many books have been written that represent that Jesus advocates paying taxes as have been written claiming this very same passage says we should not. The reason we are confounded and confused is, as usual, because we ask Jesus the wrong question. We look to Jesus for advice on taxes, and instead He gives us a lesson on obedience, charity and purpose.

What is it that is God’s. Of course everything

belongs to God, but it isn’t practical to give him everything. Because God knows we are simply creatures, He asks the simplest thing of us. God asks that we give him first fruits. First fruits are not a question of what part of our income we give to God, they aren’t in competition with the state for the first tax dollar out of our check. First fruits are our first thoughts of the day. They are our intention for our lives. First fruits means that we put God before ourselves and our desires. The contender against God for first fruits is not Caesar, but selfishness and pride. When Jesus instructs us to give to God what is God’s, He hearkens to the great commandment. What we owe God is obedience, loving God with all our heart and strength and soul and might; and charity, loving our neighbors as we love ourselves.

Which then begs the question, why does God want our first fruits. He already has everything. He asks us to give Him obedience and charity so that they can be blessed and returned. He blesses our obedience with peace in the face of Caesar’s worst. Through our charity, His love is reflected into the world, and the world is converted through that grace. Ultimately, the answer that Jesus gives to these Pharisees, and through the Gospels to us, is we are to give Caesar what God has intended for him as well. We are to take the lives we offered to God and which God returned as blessed, and give those lives to Caesar. We are to give Caesar our good example, our longsuffering and forgiveness, our courage and hope, and our prayers. At times, as we remember on Veteran’s Day, we offer Caesar our sons and daughters and spouses to serve for our defense. That can even include the offering of life or health in the service of our country. We are to give our lives to the Caesar’s of the world for their salvation, just as God gave us

the life His only Son so that we would be saved.

We would like to think that we see the benefits of that Godly will from Caesar immediately, that the candidate or regime that reflects our ethic is the one we are meant to bless. However, the fruit of our sacrifices, good example and prayer are often spent on regimes or cultures that are oppressive or even repressive. Even when the Church was in captivity, it was called upon to be a blessing to its captors. Jeremiah explains the purpose of their captivity to the Jews as they were carried off to Babylon.

“Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all who are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon. Build ye houses, and dwell in them, and plant gardens and eat the fruit thereof; take ye wives and beget sons and daughters...that you may be increased and not diminished. Seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray unto the Lord for it, for in the peace thereof ye shall have peace.” Jeremiah 29 4:7

Daniel and Meshech, Shadrach and Abednego served their captors to the best of their abilities, giving Godly example. That Godly example also meant courageously following their faith, even when the consequences would have been tortuous martyrdom by fiery furnace or fierce lions. The result of their courage and godly service was that the Babylonian despots came to know the one true God through them. Eventually, their example of godly living under exile led to those same oppressors that carried them away from the ruins of their city, to send them out again, to rebuild the greatness of their city and to honor their God.

“after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon, I will visit you and perform my good towards you, in causing you to return to (the place I have prepared for you). For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end.”

You see, ultimately, the Godly service, moral courage and self sacrificing charity we offer Caesar, even in the face of criticism or persecution, becomes the means by which Caesar is converted. It is also a blessing that is reflected to our benefit as well. St John tells us,

“Beloved, do faithfully whatever you do to the brethren and to strangers, which have born witness of your charity before the church, whom if thou bring forward on their journey, after a Godly sort, you will do well.” 3rd St John 4-6

The goodness the Lord reserves to us for sharing that kind of Godly blessing to Caesar is not reserved just for our current time and mortal plain. Caesar isn't just a political and economic power. Caesar is this world and our time. It is the dominion of the devil, of sickness and death that has to be converted. God has chosen us to be His means of effecting that conversion. He gives us, who know His blessing, to a world which does not know Him, so it will be transformed as we are transformed. How we serve Caesar also helps us grow into the service we are meant to give eternally to our heavenly King.

“Ye shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God hath commanded you, that you may live and it shall be well with you, that you may prolong your days in the land which you are to possess.” Deuteronomy 5:33

The land you are to possess is not Caesar's. The land we are to possess is the heavenly kingdom.

“Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And you shall seek me and find me, when you shall search for me with all your heart... saith the Lord and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places I have driven you, andI will bring you again to the place that I have (prepared for you).” Jeremiah 29:12-15

Jeremiah is making that promise in the name of God, not just for restoration of the Jews to Israel, but for the restoration of the New Covenant people, us, to heaven. Because Jesus loves us, He is never satisfied just to answer the questions we ask about navigating this life, but He lifts up to prepare us for our ultimate purpose, our eternal lives. As first fruits, our holy lives of courage, good example, sacrifice and prayer are the gifts God has prepared for Caesar, so that Caesar too, will follow us as we follow Jesus to our heavenly reward.

“Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things That are Gods.”

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

