

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The Pharisees desired to entangle the Lord in His talk. They couldn't wage a theological debate with Him and win. He is the "Theos" in theological. True theological discourse is simply a discussion of His Word. And the Word became Flesh, and stood before the Pharisees. There was no winning a debate with Him.

So, as did the Father of Lies in the garden, they desired to entangle Him in His talk. "Did God really say?" the author of their lies asked the first woman and her man. So too now with the Seed promised to them. The Pharisees disciples and the Herodians began with flattery. They loved nothing more than to be held in esteem by men.

They liked to be greeted in the marketplaces, to be called "Rabbi", to take the seat of honor, to be seen as religious. It is what they wanted, so they naturally assumed it is what He would want. They appealed to sinful pride. But in Him there is no sin. Their appeal only revealed their sinfulness.

Like the sign Pilate hung on the cross, the Pharisees' disciples opening volley was true: "Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the Way of God in truth." That's right. Christ is true. He is the Truth incarnate. Apart from Him there is no Truth. His Truth saves. And that Truth He desired to impart to them. But they could not receive it. They did not believe. Their words were deceitful.

And yes, He alone is the Teacher. He alone is worthy, for He is the Wisdom of God. It is He that dwells with prudence, He who finds out knowledge and discretion. Counsel is His, and sound wisdom. He is understanding. It is He, God the Son, whom God the Father possessed at the beginning of His Way, before all things, before His works of old. There was not when He was not. And He teaches the Way of God in Truth.

Nor does He regard the person of men. He reads their hearts. He sees, He knows by Divine Omniscience, that all men are sinful. He reads the hearts of the disciples of the Pharisees. He knows their plan, He knows their desire to entangle Him. He perceives their wickedness.

But in mercy, He does not strike them dead. He does not them and wither them as He withered the fig tree. In mercy, in long-suffering, He teaches them. If they will hear His lesson, there is salvation in His Words. But He speaks in parables, so that hearing unbelief cannot hear, and seeing unbelief is blind.

"Show me the tax money. Whose inscription is this?" The inscription is clear. The coin is minted with it's owner's image. "Caesar's", they answer. "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's," He teaches. That means they must render their hearts, their minds, and their souls. For all are God's. They must put aside their false religion, their trust in self, and trust in Christ alone.

But they cannot. They marvel at His answer, at His rhetorical power, but they leave Him and go away. Faith never does that. Faith clings to Christ. He alone has the Words of eternal life. If they really believed that He is True, that He teaches the Way of God in Truth, that He does not

regard the person of men, if they really believed that they could not leave. But leave they did. They revealed in whose image they were minted. They rejected God.

What argument have you used when you have desired your will be done? Expediency? Convenience? What argument have you used when you desired to explain away your desires and lusts quite contrary to what God forbids? What in your life has kept you from God? Has pride swelled your ego to the extent that humility has proven impossible? Has what men think of you been more important than what God thinks of you? Knowing the clear Word of God, have you determined that what you think is right is better than what God clearly says?

So you too have tried to entangle God in His Word. But like the disciples of the Pharisees, you have come woefully short. God's Word is Truth. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Hearing His Word, you must change your life, your beliefs, your way of living, your way of speaking, and conform all things to His Word. For in His Word is life. He alone is True, and he teaches the Way of God, which is the Way of Salvation, in Truth.

Faith renders to God what is God's. And like that tax coin, you bear an image and an inscription, both of which God can clearly see. In Holy Baptism you were minted, created anew, made shiny and gleaming as your sins were removed. You were born again in the image of God, for we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, who is Himself the Image of the invisible God, being the Firstborn over all creation.

The Image of the God who redeems you was marred. He was stricken and scourged. Nails pierced the Flesh He took on. Thorns encircled His brow. The One who did not regard the person of men was put to death by men, the very men for whom He died. And in His death is the forgiveness of all your sins. In His resurrection is your justification, as you who bear God's Name and image are rendered to the God that made you.

So you, O Christian, you who God chose from the foundation of the world in Christ, you were predestined to be conformed to the image of God the Son, by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And as you once were made in the image of the man of dust, you now bear the image of the heavenly Man. You are God's, and His image is on you and in you.

And so too His inscription. The tax coin bore Caesar's name. But God's Name, the Name to Holy to speak, the Name of life, is inscribed on you. For the Pastor held you over the font, and made the sign of the cross upon your forehead and your breast, and baptized you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. You received the sign of the Holy Cross to mark you as one redeemed of Christ the Crucified. God's image and inscription are on you.

At His Wisdom and grace, at His mercy and favor, at His Word you marvel, but you do not leave. You draw nigh unto the Lord, because that is what faith does. You cling to Christ. You draw nigh and take Body of the Lord. You kneel and drink His Blood. You feast on the Holy Eucharist, the Meal of Salvation, the Meal in which He is Food and Giver.

St. Matthew 22:15-22
The Fifth Sunday after Michaelmass, 2016 A.✠ D.

For your citizenship is in heaven, from which you also eagerly await your Savior, the Lord that banquets you this day. And soon He in whose image you are re-made will transform your lowly body, that it may be conformed to His Glorious Body.

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