

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Jesus is put into an impossible situation in today's Gospel. Remember, though, Jesus is God – the God of the impossible – so impossible situations are possible for Him. Let's look at the situation.

We have three groups of people in this parable today: the Pharisees, their disciples, and the Herodians. The Pharisees are the Jews who strive to follow the law to the smallest detail. They separate themselves from anything and anyone that could make them unclean. They want no dealings with the Gentiles (anyone who is non-Jewish), since they are ritually unclean, and they hold fast to all sorts of ritual purity laws. The disciples of the Pharisees are those who are trying to learn from these older, more experienced Pharisees. They walk in their footsteps, and try to think as they do. The Herodians are a group of Jewish people who are loyal to King Herod – a Gentile who rules Galilee (the northern part of Israel) – and is under the Roman Empire and Caesar.

The Pharisees send their disciples with the Herodians to Jesus. Do you see how this is odd? The Pharisees would usually want nothing to do with the Herodians – the Herodians might defile them! The Pharisees in an attempt to trip up Jesus want to have two opposing sides present... but they don't want to be there themselves... they send their disciples to be defiled by the "Gentile-lovers."

It is interesting to note how far people are willing to go for hatred... and whom they are willing to "throw under the bus." They would associate (or, rather, have their peons associate) with their enemies. I think about a modern equivalent today on social media. How many people bully others, spread gossip, are ready to trample others down without feeling any guilt for how they are destroying the reputation (and maybe the lives) of others. When we disagree with someone, how far are we willing to go to be "right"?

So, we now know the players in the Gospel. The Herodians (pro-Rome and Gentiles) and the disciples of the Pharisees (anti-Rome and Gentiles) converge on Jesus and ask Him a question: "Is it lawful to pay the census tax?" (Matthew 22:17). If Jesus says, "No, it is not lawful to associate with Gentiles," the Herodians can accuse Him of treason. If Jesus says, "Yes, it is lawful to pay the tax," the Pharisees can claim that He is pro-Roman, and Jesus would lose much of His popular following.

How does Jesus get out of this impossible situation? He looks at the coin used to pay the tax. Since the coin bears the image and inscription of Caesar, it belongs to Caesar and, by justice, should be paid to him. And here is where Jesus turns the tables – "and [repay] to God what belongs to God" (Matthew 22:21). Here He is referencing Genesis, how God created each person – Jew and Gentile alike – in His own image and likeness. He calls them to give back to God *themselves*.

What does this mean for us today? We belong to God. Everything we have is gift – from our intelligence, our ability to work, our ability to breathe, even! All is gift from God. Everything we have is His. He asks us to offer to Him ourselves. It's not that God wants a lot... He wants everything! But don't be afraid! God doesn't ask for everything so He can take it away from us, but so that we can find it in Him, in His love! As the immortal poem "The Hound of Heaven" (by Francis Thompson) goes:

**"Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee  
Save Me, save only Me?  
All which I took from thee I did but take,  
Not for thy harms.  
But just that thou might'st seek it in my arms.  
All which thy child's mistake  
Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home;  
Rise, clasp My hand, and come!"**

God says to this person that all that He took was so that he could "seek it in my arms." All belongs to God. All is gift! All God wants is *us*!

May we look to the God of the impossible to help us through our deepest darkness; even when all else seems taken away, to find it in His arms of love!