

The Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost – 2020

Isaiah 45:1-7

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Matthew 22:15-22

If you pay any attention to the television or the radio, you will occasionally hear an advertisement for some pharmaceutical drug. Now don't get me wrong, I like the medical community. I like advancements in medicines that help heal our wounds, medicines that resolve our ills, but some of these commercials are 100% crazy town. It's what comes at the end of the commercials that grabs my attention. It's in the form of a disclaimer, a warning to those who might ingest their new wonder drug. I've actually heard things like this: "If you begin to vomit uncontrollably after taking Repatha, stop taking Repatha." It gets worse. "If your skin begins to blister and peel and your whole body begins to itch after taking Repatha, stop taking Repatha." So, this tells you two things. Number 1, it tells you that people aren't too smart. The drug company has to tell us to stop taking their drug when something horrible starts happening because we can't figure it out on our own. Number 2, it tells us that these drugs sometimes aren't the greatest thing ever.

So, my sons and I have a game – dreaming up the most ludicrous side-effects, and insert them at the end of the commercial. If your toes begin to spontaneously combust after taking Zyrtec, please, stop taking Zyrtec. If your head begins to spin completely around on your shoulders after taking Prozac, by all means, stop taking Prozac. If your internal organs begin to come out of your ears after taking Lipitor, do not take any more Lipitor. And finally, if your heart stops beating after taking Xarelto, maybe you shouldn't take any more Xarelto. Okay, that's meant to be funny. There are spiritual things that we ingest that have a terrible effect on our soul. That's not funny at all. One of the foremost is hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is the practice of claiming to have moral standards or beliefs to which one's own behavior does not conform. Being overly concerned about the speck in your neighbor's eye while having a log in your own is hypocrisy. Behaving one way in public for everyone to see and behaving in a much more wretched way privately, out of the watchful eye of those you want to impress, that is hypocrisy. Tying up heavy burdens for others to bear while you skip and dance without bearing your own cross, that is hypocrisy. Ingest this spiritual narcotic and you will do grave damage to your soul. Drink long at the fountain of hypocrisy and the heartbeat of your faith will stop. No joke.

Hypocrites came to Jesus, attempting to impale our Lord on the horns of a dilemma. First, they butter Him up with empty chatter. "Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances" (Matthew 22:16). Hypocrites! Earlier in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus called them out: "This people honors me with their lips but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:8-9). After the exercise of flattery, the hypocrites dropped their verbal noose with which they intend to hang Christ the King. "Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" (Matthew 22:17). It is a simple dilemma. Two options in regard to paying the tax – both will alienate someone. If Jesus endorses paying the tax to Caesar then He will alienate all the Jews who are suffering from Roman oppression. If Jesus says that the tax is unlawful, then He will become an enemy of the state. Either way, Jesus appears cooked.

This brief interaction illustrates a couple of things. One of them is this: The truth is more agile than deception. The truth can never be trapped. Never, never, never. The truth sets us free. Deception is a kissing cousin to hypocrisy. Align yourself with deception and you will soon align yourself with a prison cell – spiritual, emotional, a place that crushes the soul. The Lord Christ can't be trapped. He obliterates hypocrisy and opens wide the door to the sweetest Gospel, illuminating the sacrifice of the cross, the restoration of love. Jesus is aware of their malice: "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin for the tax" (Mt 22:18-19). You can sense the drama of the situation rising. The proud Pharisees think that they have the upper hand. Our Lord has an answer. Show me the coin for the tax. It's Caesar's coin. It has Caesar's image, his likeness and inscription. Jesus asks them these things and they respond accordingly. Then He said it: "Therefore render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mt 22:21). That, my friends, is magnificent!

Caesar's coin – if he wants it back, give it to him. Caesar's coin, Caesar's image, Caesar's likeness, Caesar's tax, Caesar's government. Render to him what is his. The rest is why you are here, in this place, hearing God's Word. Render unto God what is God's. Man was created in God likeness. Male and female, created He them – imprinted on them His image. They were holy, minted in paradise. Have you ever seen a coin stamped? Common metal becomes valuable as a mere slug is imprinted with an image that has the wealth of the nation behind it. One moment it is ordinary, the next it is a coin with value. God's image was imprinted on Adam and Eve. Humanity was the Creator's coin. His inscription of love animated their hearts. What a gift to our first parents. And that image was lost. Sin, rebellion, hypocrisy, deceit, and death. What lives in us? You and me, what lives in us? Lust and pride and selfishness galore. But God wants His coin – us. He sends His Son to find what was lost, to return it.

Jesus is the exact image of God. True God and true man in one person. He acts with a radical devotion to His Father and a radical love for you. For Him there was no dilemma. Love led Him to render unto God what is God's. Do you know what is God's, what belongs to Him? You do. God came searching for you – when you were lost in your sin and death, God came searching for you. He didn't send a tax collector. He sent a Redeemer. Render unto God what is God's. You are here, in this place, because Christ did this. On the cross, Jesus rendered Himself and you to the Father. Think of it, what was imprinted on Him at the scourging post? What was imprinted on Him as He was flogged? That horrible suffering is for our sin. Imprinted on Him was our lust, our pride, our greed, and our hate. His love for you took your sin and the divine punishment that went along with it. He was returning you to God. Returning to you the image of holiness and righteousness and beauty and nobility and all that is good – all that is very good.

In death, Jesus gives back to the Father what belongs to Him – redeemed humanity. Jesus is humanity reduced to one and He gave all He had to the Father. He kept the law perfectly. He suffered for all of our sins, perfectly. You were redeemed perfectly. You have been baptized into Jesus' death and resurrection – haven't you. You've been made new, imprinted with His image. "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20). Render unto God what is God's. Jesus did that for all of us. And we are minted, made valuable with His righteousness as we have been washed in His blood. You bear

the image of the crucified and risen King. Women, you are regal, queenly, honored and esteemed. You bear the image of Christ the King in your being. Hold yourselves as daughters of God, which you are. Be faithful and teach your daughters to be faithful. Men, you are the strength of the family, the culture, the congregation. Be quick to sacrifice, eager to serve, and teach your sons the way of Christ – that the first are to be last.

Render unto God what is God's. That offering plate, which we do not pass, you put your tithe in there and that is great – you are rendering unto God your gift. As you do this, enlarge the gesture in your heart, your mind. Put yourself in that plate, render unto God all that you are. Hypocrisy cannot live in a heart that does this. We repent of our sins; our whole Christian life is one of Repentance. That was Luther's first thesis, of those 95 theses, which he nailed to the church door at Wittenberg in 1517, on October 31st. Repentance is the antidote to hypocrisy. We drink deeply of the truth, the glorious truth that when Jesus of Nazareth died upon the holy cross, He rendered us to the Father. We ingest the wondrous truth that our sins are forgiven, heaven is our home, and that the Lord is among us, active to bless us on our way. He renders Himself to us in this place. He withholds nothing but gives us the bounty of His grace, His life, His love. Knowing this, we are eager to render unto God what is God's. What a beautiful life that is.