



Exegesis of the 1st reading, IS 45: 1, 4-6

In an oracle just prior to this reading, the prophet spoke of the wonderful power of God whose creative ways surpass those of any human artisan. Mortal craftsmen make lifeless images of divinities; God creates living and vibrant servants (Is 44). Here the prophet carries forward this theme of God's marvelous work and uses a foreign king for the benefit of Israel.

1) *God's anointed.* Cyrus founded the Persian Empire after Babylon surrendered to him in 539 BC. History regards Cyrus as an enlightened ruler because of his forward-thinking policies toward other nations. It was Cyrus who allowed the exiles of Israel to return to their homeland. In this oracle, the prophet even calls Cyrus an anointed one, a messiah. This is quite extraordinary, but entirely appropriate since, although he does not know it, Cyrus is serving the God of Israel by benefitting God's people through his enlightened policies. The first part of the reading reviews the triumphant progress of Cyrus. He subdues nations and city gates swing open to welcome him.

2) *for Jacob.* Cyrus' victories are possible only because God holds his right hand. This king's triumphs are not for his own sake, but for the sake of "Jacob, my servant." This title of "servant" is reserved for relatively few in the Bible. Jacob is worthy of it because the experience of exile humbled the people. With all their pride removed, they are, at last, willing to serve God's interests rather than their own. This oracle was fulfilled when Cyrus permitted the exiles to return to their homeland and rebuild Jerusalem and its temple.

Exegesis of the 2nd reading, 1 Thes 1: 1-5b

1) *Endurance.* Paul and his associates give constant thanks to God for the unfailing loyalty the faithful people in Thessalonica have for the Gospel.

2) *Strength.* Paul assures them they can rely on the Holy Spirit to give them all the strength and power they need in their labors for the Gospel.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Mt 22:15-21

Today's Gospel narrates an attempt by the Pharisees and Herodians to entrap Jesus over the issue of paying the Roman poll tax. The Herodians were supporters of the dynasty begun by Herod the Great and continued by Herod



Antipas. They supported paying the poll tax, which makes it odd that they are in the story. The Pharisees would not support the tax since it meant acknowledging a foreign, pagan sovereignty over Israel. The point of the story is to see how Jesus responds to this attempt to entrap him.

1) *The question.* The Pharisees and Herodians begin by heaping up phony respect for Jesus as a teacher who knows and teaches the way of God in accordance with the truth. They also declare Jesus to be honest, fair, and not swayed by anyone's opinion. The purpose of all this buildup is to confront Jesus with what they consider to be a clever question that he will not be able to answer with- out some form of self-incrimination. "Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?" If he says yes, he will be in trouble with the Jews. If he says no, he will be in trouble with the Roman authorities.

2) *The hypocrites.* Jesus knows immediately what they are up to. This is a test under the guise of a legitimate question. Jesus calls them hypocrites which means that they are only acting as if they really care about his opinion. Cleverly, he requests a coin from them, and they give him a Roman coin. This coin would have been worth a denarius which was the amount required by the poll tax—a full day's pay.

3) *What belongs to whom?* Jesus asks them whose image and inscription was on the Roman coin. The inscription would have read, "Tiberius Caesar son of the divine Augustus, great high priest." Technically, this means that Caesar is the rightful owner of the coin because it is state money. So Jesus tells them to give the coin back to Caesar because he owns it. Nothing is said about the poll tax, only Caesar's coin. Then Jesus tells them to give to God what belongs to God. For a Jew, everything belonged to God. God's claim is much greater than anything Caesar could demand. The entrapment failed and the question about paying taxes went unanswered.

HOMILY CONNECTIONS

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING: The Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities met. Therefore every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities – to one another, to our families and



to the larger society.

“In human society one man’s natural right gives rise to a corresponding duty in other men; the duty, that is, of recognizing and respecting that right. Every basic human right draws its authoritative force from the natural law, which confers it and attaches to it its respective duty. Hence, to claim one’s right and ignore one’s duties, or only half fulfill them, is like building a house with one hand and tearing it down with another.” *St. John XXIII, Peace on Earth {Pacem in Terris} no30.*

“The link consists in this: individual rights, when detached from a framework of duties which grants them their full meaning, can run wild, leading to an escalation of demands which is effectively unlimited and indiscriminate.” *Pope Benedict XVI, Charity in Truth {Caritas in Veritate} no. 43*

SUMMARY: : Jesus challenged the world views of the most active religious and political parties of his time in an effort to show us that we can best offer true worship to God when our actions are consistent with the faith we proclaim.

A) ATTENTION-GETTER: Today on this World Mission Sunday, we listen to scriptures that speak about governments, rights and responsibilities. In our secular world, in less than two weeks, as we approach All Saints Day, thousands of Halloween costumes will be bought and made across the United States in anticipation of the big Halloween night. There will be ghosts and witches, skeletons, zombies, pirates, and princesses who become long-whiskered cats and floppy-eared dogs for a night. An enormous amount of time, talent, and treasure will be expended to pretend for a few hours to be something on the outside that we are not on the inside. In contrast to Halloween, Jesus is trying to show us how important it is to be consistent, inside and outside, in what we say and do.

B) APPLICATION: Pharisees and Herodians, who never agreed about anything, did agree that Jesus challenged their sets of world views. For the Pharisees, a respectable life was only to be found and achieved by a strict, complete adherence to the Jewish law. The Herodians were practical politicians intent on keeping peace with the mighty Roman Empire. They “went along to get along” to a comfortable



life of power and wealth. The Herodians did not consider it a big deal if their security and comfort meant that they sometimes had to ignore the commandments, laws, and rules the Pharisees deemed so important.

1) But Jesus taught that the goal of human life was neither respectability nor comfort.

a) Jesus had talked with the Samaritan woman at the well and the tax collector who climbed a tree to see him pass on the street.

b) Jesus told parables about the rich suffering when they died while the poor went to heaven, and didn't mind when his disciples failed to keep all of the rules about fasting.

c) So Jesus offended both the Pharisees and Herodians and they thought that together they would trick Jesus with a question about taxes.

d) If Jesus answered yes, he would be in trouble with all of the respectable Jews who hated the tax, but if he answered no, he would be in trouble with the Romans who wanted that tax money and who had an army waiting to take it.

2) But Jesus turned the question about taxes into a much more important question: How we are to relate to God?

a) Jesus taught that the goal of human life is about honest relationships with God and others.

b) This conversation about taxes was taking place in the courtyard of the Temple, where even the Herodians would have agreed with the Pharisees that there should be no graven images.

c) Hidden away on his person, one questioner had a Roman coin. His "inside" was hardly consistent with his "outside," as the coin had the Roman emperor's picture on it.

d) So Jesus pointed out what was really inside the heart of those who questioned him, not a quest for wisdom, but a desire to get Jesus in trouble rather than to listen and learn from him.

3) What belongs to Caesar, and what belongs to God?

a) In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah made it clear that God can work through human governments. Government is necessary for the common good; we need to pay our share of taxes. We have a responsibility to participate in society for the common good.



- b) But even as we pay taxes, we must remember that ultimately everything truly good in the world comes from God who made us, who loves us, and who longs to share with us all that we truly need.
- c) If we want to claim that we worship God on the outside when we know others are listening to our words and watching our actions, then we should consistently worship God on the inside, too.
- d) The inside worship that we offer to God is with our hearts and with humility, never seeking to get the best of God with a bargain or a trick, but always longing to give our best to God.

C) TRANSITION TO LITURGY OF EUCHARIST: When our liturgical ministers come to the altar wearing white albs, recalling the day they were baptized and anointed priest, prophet and king, it is important to remember that the vestments are not costumes, but symbols of just how deeply blessed we are that God has called all of us to come into God's presence. And how special it is to be set aside, whether for a season as an altar server, or for a lifetime as a deacon or priest, to be part of our worship of God.