

Currencies and denominations
29th Sunday of Ordinary Time
Matthew 22:15-21
October 19, 2014

When you encounter someone for the first time, what do you see first: Their smile? Their scowl? Their walk? Their dress? Their skin color?

When you're interviewing someone for a position with your company or organization, what do you look for first: Their education? Their training? Their accomplishments? The schools they attended? The degrees they earned? The spelling of their last name?

When you hear someone identify their nationality, what do you immediately presume: That they are fellow countrymen? That they must have some special interest in a specific kind of music or food? That you need to be careful around them?

When you see someone wearing a religious symbol of some kind, what's your initial reaction: They must belong to your church? They must be conservative? They must self-righteous? They must be simplistic, pietistic do-gooders? They might be terrorists?

When someone expresses an opinion that you do not agree with or offers an idea with which you do not concur: Do you challenge them? Do you engage them in a

dialogue? Do you reconsider your own position? Do you walk away?

When you meet someone at a function, do you ask yourself: *What can I learn from them? Or What can they do for me?*

Are you able to get beyond race and gender, nationality and religion, politics and culture, to see brother and sister human beings?

Or do you accept only specific currencies and denominations of people?

Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees in today's Gospel centers on a coin and what that coin represents.

But Jesus does let the coin and its inscription force him into making choices and judgments based on politics and religion - and all the issues that surround those institutions.

His answer surprised and challenged everyone. It still does.

Today, I think Jesus is inviting us to examine the coin and then examine ourselves.

Whose image does the coin bear? Whose image do we bear? While Caesar is in the business of minting coins, God is in the business of minting souls.

Caesar gets his own image returned to him in taxes and tribute, but because our souls bear the divine image of God, our lives, our hearts and our talents should be “repaid” to God. For Jesus, the question isn’t “How much do you owe?”, but rather, “Who do you look like?”

Isaiah, like all prophets, views everything through a lens focused on God.

In the first reading today, Isaiah reminds us, “

"I have called you by your name, giving you a title, though you knew me not. I am the Lord and there is no other, there is no God besides me. It is I who arm you, though you know me not, so that toward the rising and the setting of the sun people may know that there is none besides me. I am the Lord, there is no other."

Whether we know God or not, acknowledge God or not, we belong to God.

Let me say it again we belong to God.

There is no "other." We are each minted in God’s image—named, titled and armed for action.

When we remember who we look like, we can begin to recognize the faces of those around us--each one also created in the image and likeness of God.

When we remember who we look like, the truth of that knowledge will light our way into the lonely deserts and desperate streets.

That truth will transform us, allowing us to become agents of hope even in the darkest of times.

Whether we pay taxes to Caesar in Rome or to leaders in Washington or Boonville, Forestport or Utica, or to the State of New York is not important.

Jesus calls us to approach the complexities and complications facing humanity with God's Spirit of compassion and a commitment to work together to uphold and protect the dignity of all as children of God.

What matters to Jesus, and to us, is the coin of the soul.