

Sunday Sermon October 18, 2026

If you were here last weekend, you know that I was whining about the Gospel passage: the story of the king who threw a wedding banquet for his son, and the invited guests didn't come, so the king invited everyone from the highways and byways, but then a guy showed up in the wrong clothing and the king threw him out. So I said -that's probably my least favorite of all of Jesus' parables.

But this weekend we have one of my favorite Jesus stories, so you won't hear me whining. Tonight's/Today's Gospel features the religious authorities trying to set a trap for Jesus. They want a "gotcha" moment, where whatever answer He gives will get him into trouble, and they believe they have the perfect plan.

After buttering Jesus up: "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and always tell the truth, and always treat everyone fairly" - butter, butter, butter. They ask the trap question: "Is it lawful to pay taxes to the Emperor or not?"

Gotcha – The questioners are Pharisees and Herodians. The Pharisees were concerned with keeping Torah faith in the midst of Roman occupation. They felt like paying taxes was supporting their ongoing oppression.

The Herodians supported the ruling family – the descendants of King Herod. They supported the Emperor, but they were seen as collaborating with Rome.

So if Jesus says "yes" pay your taxes, He's seen as advocating support of Roman occupation and oppression. His followers and the crowds will be unhappy.

If he says "no" don't pay, He'll be in trouble with the authorities and the Emperor who want to see the revenue flowing in. So in one case, the people will be unhappy, in the other, the authorities. They've trapped Him. But maybe not...

Instead of answering, Jesus asks for a coin and answers their question with a question: "Whose head and title are on the coin?"

It's interesting to note that the religious folks had the coin in their pocket.

Imperial coinage bore Caesar's likeness and the inscription: "Tiberius Caesar, august son of the divine Augustus, high priest." The divine Augustus? The Emperor proclaimed Divine? The coin was an idol and should never have been in the temple in the first place.

"You hypocrites" carrying around your false idols in God's house and seeking to trap me, I can imagine Jesus thinking. So He delivers the line, turns the "gotcha" on them: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.

The coin bears Caesar's image, so give it to him. And give to God what is God's. That's it. That's what the whole encounter turns on. If we give the coin to Caesar because it bears Caesar's image, and we are to give to God what is God's, then the logical question is: "what bears God's image?" - "what belongs to God?" (Pause – Point) God's image is stamped on you – and your neighbor.

Some of my earliest and most lasting memories are of experiences I had in church – the Catholic church that I grew up in and where I spent a lot of time.

I remember being trained to be an altar server when I was in the 5th grade. Most all of us 5th grade boys – it was only boys then – were trained as "servers" what we call "acolytes."

I remember Fr. Allen giving us a tour of the sacristy and the altar area, showing us the robes and vessels and candle lighters and incense and fancy kneeling cushions. It was very exciting. It felt like a whole new world, a most special world.

I remember him taking us over to a side altar in the church. On the beautiful marble altar sat a large gold box, elaborately decorated and surrounded by candles.

He explained that this was the tabernacle, where the consecrated bread, the Body of Christ, was kept. He told us that this was a sacred, holy object

because Jesus was present here in a very special way. He taught us to act with reverence (a new word to us), to genuflect or bow when passing by.

Then he pulled out an elaborate gold key with a fancy tassel and inserted it in the tabernacle. Turning it to the left, the two gold doors with the angels carved on them swung open, revealing an inner door that slid aside, exposing the ciborium, the elaborate cup that contained the communion bread.

“This is where Jesus is present in a very special way, inside this tabernacle” Fr. Allen said “and you know what: when you receive him you are the tabernacle, Jesus is inside of you.”

I’ll never forget that he said that. That we are living tabernacles for the presence of God.

Jesus said: “Give to God what is God’s.” What belongs to God? What bears the divine image. (Pause/Point) We do.

Genesis 1: 26 “In the divine image, in the image of God, God created them. So- give to God what belongs to God. Give all that you are and all that you have to God.

See the sacred in yourself and in your neighbor. Affirm the sacredness of human life, as we make our way through botched executions and the suggestion of a public, publicized execution in our own country...

Each of us, and all of our neighbors, are stamped with the image and likeness of God. We sometime do our best to deny or hide it, but it’s there. When we were baptized, we were anointed with oil and the prayer: “Be sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ’s own forever.”

We belong to God, the One in whose image we are made, and so we give back with devotion, love and ongoing service. We respect the life and dignity of every human being.

Living tabernacles – my memory from 5th grade, still works well today. Dwelling places for the Divine, bearers of the image of God.

Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. Alleluia, Amen