



Oct. 22, 2017 Mt. 22: 15-22 & Is. 45: 1-6

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Link to [Beck](#) (paywall) other [Beck](#)

Stone, Naomi. [The Sacred Touch of Spirit](#)

Rolheiser, Fr. Ron. [We Can't Turn Away.....](#)

[Monastery Sunday Homilies](#)

[Youtube link](#)

#### ENTERING THE SCENE:

By the time this gospel was composed the early church had already experienced the destruction of the temple. So this story comes from the memory of those who had to decide how to live in this new reality. To whom do they owe their allegiance? The latest Caesar who sometimes thought he was divine, or the God of Jesus? Every age has to wrestle with this same basic question. Whose am I?

#### Mt. 22:15-22

15 Then the **Pharisees** went out and laid plans to **trap** him in his words. 16 They sent their **disciples** to him along with the **Herodians**. "Teacher," they said, "we know you are a man of **integrity** and that you **teach** the way of **God** in accordance with the **truth**. You aren't **swayed** by men, because you **pay** no **attention** to who they are. 17 Tell us then, what is your **opinion**? Is it right to pay **taxes** to **Caesar** or not?" 18 But Jesus, knowing their **evil intent**, said, "You **hypocrites**, why are you trying to **trap** me? 19 Show me

the **coin** used for **paying** the **tax**." They brought him a **denarius**, 20 and he asked them, "Whose **portrait** is this? And whose inscription?" 21 **Caesar's**," they replied. Then he said to them, "Give to **Caesar** what is **Caesar's**, and to **God** what is **God's**." 22 When they **heard** this, they were **amazed**. So they left him and went away.

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Jesus named the real reason for the question. Do you think any of those people used this opening to reconsider their ideas? If so why? If not, why?

**PRAYER:** Teacher Jesus, when I am so sure of myself I am tempted to use my superior position to play gottcha, I tend to forget that those on the receiving end of my hubris are made in the image of God. You never did this. In fact you used their arrogance like a master warrior who knows how to use the energy of the assailant against the aggressor. This opened an opportunity for some to think anew. Help me learn to do the same. Amen.

#### WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

**PHARISEES:** The Pharisees were lay people who took their religious practices very seriously. They opened up the possibility for new ways of thinking about God for the average person who was not a priest.

*Who are modern day Pharisee's? Are they having a similar effect in the religious life of today?*

**TRAP:** A trap catches us unaware and imprisons us.

*What has the ability to catch you unaware? Can scripture study help prevent this? How?*

**WORDS:** Words create realities. People experienced God in a new way through Jesus' words.

*Why were Jesus' words good news (gospel) for some, and cause for murder in others?*

**DISCIPLES:** A disciple was someone learning a discipline from a master. There are two masters in this story, Herod Antipas for Rome, and Jesus for God.

*What were the people in the story learning? What is this story teaching you?*

**HERODIANS:** The Herodians were lukewarm Jews who had accommodated themselves to Roman rule in order to safeguard the status quo.

*Are there any 'Herodians' living today? Have you ever been a Herodian? How? Why?*

**TEACHER:** A teacher is someone who is recognized as one having expertise in an area that you lack.  
*Do you think Jesus' questioners truly regarded him as a teacher? Has anyone ever 'set you up' like they did Jesus? What did it feel like? How did you sense that you were being set up?*

**INTEGRITY:** To have integrity means to be a whole person. The people challenging Jesus identified him as someone whose actions and deeds always matched.  
*Why do you think this word was used in this setting? Do you think it fulfilled its intended purpose? Did the way Jesus found to respond become a proof of his integrity? How?*

**TEACH:** To teach is to share an understanding that has been achieved by standing under something.  
*How do you recognize that someone has stood under something and therefore has something to teach?*

**GOD:** The Jewish people had come to know that God was the origin of all that is created. Other religions of Jesus' day ascribed god-ness to created realities that seemed beyond their control or understanding.  
*How does Jesus' reply help clarify the meaning of the word, God? Can it help you to identify the difference between God and gods?*

**TRUTH:** For the sincere seeker, the truth set them free. For the hypocrite, it became their very trap.  
*How does Jesus use the truth to reveal the real motives of his adversaries? Does he do it in a way that enables them to grow? Do they?*

**SWAYED:** To be swayed is to be moved by a force, such as wind, water, or a persuasive argument. Jesus was very aware of what was swaying those who confronted him with this situation.  
*How does Jesus respond? Does his answer confirm his integrity? Is anyone swayed in this situation? Who? How?*

**PAY /PAYING:** To pay is to give in return for something obtained.  
*By having the detested/idolatrous coin of the realm on their person, how have the Jews paid? What have they been given in return?*

**ATTENTION:** To pay attention is to recognize that something is happening that concerns you in some way. Jesus' adversaries noted that Jesus did not let a person's status influence his behavior  
*Can you find a hidden reproach in this statement made by those questioning Jesus? Have you ever been attacked in such a manner as Jesus is in the parable? How did it feel? Were you taken off guard by the apparent praise, only to find a hidden trap in the approach?*

**OPINION:** An opinion is someone's reasoned judgment on a given issue.  
*Where the questioners really asking for Jesus' opinion? Have you ever been put in a similar situation where a question is really a trap? Were you able to use Jesus' method of teaching in that situation?*

**TAX/TAXES:** Rome, and the temple, both exacted heavy taxation on the people. Instead of serving the needs of the people, they served the needs of the oppressor, both civil and religious.  
*Are you in a similar situation in regards to the way taxes are used today? If Jesus asked you for a coin, what would that coin say about you?*

**CAESAR:** Very often a Caesar was god for the Romans. By the time of Matthew's gospel many Christians have been killed because they would not worship the current Caesar as God.  
*What gods, besides God, are worshipped today? Does this story help you to identify the gods in your life?*

**EVIL INTENT:** To have evil intent one must premeditate the action. Jesus saw through intentions and identified them as evil, yet he once again responded in a way that his adversaries could come out ahead if they wanted to.  
*Do you think anyone went home that day and reconsidered their motives? What might have influenced such a change? Have you ever had to have second thoughts because of an adversary's persuasive argument? Did they leave you room to decide freely?*

**HYPOCRITE:** A hypocrite is someone who is playing a part.  
*What part are the people challenging Jesus playing? Do you think they know they are only playing a part? Can a person be a hypocrite without being aware of it? How?*

**COIN:** Coins not only were the medium of exchange, they were also loaded with symbolism. The coins you carried identified much about you and your loyalties. If you were a pious Jew, just carrying the wrong coins made you ritually unclean. When Jesus asks to be shown a coin, the person betrayed their real allegiance when offering the coin of the Roman realm.

What medium of exchange identifies your values today? How many credit cards do you own, and what limits do they have? How would someone be able to discern your loyalties by way of your medium of exchange?



**DENARIUS:** The denarius was the coin needed to pay Caesar's tax to maintain his kingdom. It was a living wage for one day. The inscription on the coin read: "Tiberius Caesar son of the divine Augustus, great high priest.

*What is revealed by the fact that a denarius was easily produced in response to Jesus question? What might be carried around today that could reveal hypocrisy in us?*

**PORTRAIT:** The Jewish coins carried no portraits because this was seen as a form of idolatry. *Why do you think they forbid such portraits? What is it about a portrait that could have such an association?*

**HEARD:** When you hear something you register it in your consciousness. *What do you think the people heard that amazed them? Why do you think they went away?*

**AMAZED:** The word amazement implies open-mouthed awe. Something totally unexpected and yet wonder-filled has just happened. *What happens to you when you become amazed? When was the last time you were amazed? Why do you think Jesus' adversaries were amazed?*

**PARALLEL TEXTS:** Mt. 22:15-22 // Mk. 12:13-17; Lk. 20: 20-26; Lk. 11:54; Mt. 22:21 // Rom. 13:7;

**OTHER READINGS FOR THE WEEK:** Is. 45:1,4-6: [Ps. 96:1-10](#); 1 Thess. 1:1-5; Mt. 22:15-21; Revised Common Lectionary: Ex. 33:12-23; [Ps. 99](#); 1 Thess. 1: 1-10; Mt. 22: 15-22;

#### **SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:**

This means being so deeply rooted in your essence and your inner honesty that falsehood is not an option. [Cynthia Bourgeault](#)

When I'm sailing on the Atlantic Ocean, I often use a GPS, a Global Positioning System. It lets me know where I am and where to steer to reach my destination. We all have a GPS inside us, a God Positioning System: the heart. When the heart is attuned, it will allow us to perceive in a whole different way. The egoic, binary operating system perceives by separating and differentiating things from each other. The heart's perception is pattern oriented. It perceives the whole and then discerns its own place within that whole. Third force is sustained by the movement of love within the Trinity. Cynthia Bourgeault

"Wonder rather than doubt is the root of knowledge." – Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*

"Simple truths are more powerful than empires." -Mahatma Gandhi

In the time of Jesus, the coins struck in Galilee were issued by the Jewish client king Herod Antipas. Like other Jewish coins of this period, they did not depict living things, whether humans, animals or pagan deities. However, these were not the only coins to circulate in the region; others included coins struck by nearby pagan cities, especially Tyre. In contrast to Jewish coins, those issued by official Roman mints also had anthropomorphic and zoomorphic images. Jews could not have helped but notice the contrast between locally produced coins and those struck by pagan authorities in non-Jewish areas. Mark A. Chancey BAR: 11-12/07 Pg. 8.

The passage ends with the narrator's comment: "And they were utterly amazed at him." Why were they amazed? On the surface Jesus suggests that since the Pharisees and the Herodians were using the emperor's coins, they were already part of the Roman imperial system and so should pay the emperor's taxes: "Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's." Thus the Herodians are silenced. On a deeper level, Jesus is challenging Jewish religious persons to be as observant (and more so) in fulfilling their obligations to God as they are to the Roman officials: ". . . and to God the things that are God's." Moreover, some could interpret the second part of Jesus' statement as a challenge to the authority of the Roman emperor. In this way the Pharisees and others who resented the Roman imperial order are silenced. The opponents are amazed mainly because Jesus has eluded their trap. He has shown up his opponents as already participating in the Roman imperial order. But his answer is sufficiently ambiguous so as to leave both sides wondering whether Jesus was for or against them. And he leaves us with our own ambivalence about the rights and powers of government when viewed from a biblical perspective.

If you are trying to transform a brutalized society into one where people can live in dignity and hope, you begin with the empowering of the most powerless." -Adrienne Rich

The term “Herodians” appears three times in the New Testament (Mt. 22:16 and Mark 3:6 and 12: 13) and refers to subjects of the king who, in exchange for their loyalty, enjoyed various economic rewards. Wealthy landowners who had become established in the days of the Hasmonean Jewish rulers who preceded Herod in the first Century B.C.E. continued to expand their estates by deception and oppression, inciting mass resentment. Social polarity was exacerbated, leading to unrest. Pages 18ff.  
Hirschfeld, Yizhar, Vamos, Miriam Feinberg. A Country Gentleman’s Estate: Unearthing the Splendors of Ramat Hanadiv. Bible Review 3/4/2005

**Egerton Papyrus 2**--And they, coming to him to test him, said, "Teacher Jesus, we know that you are from God, for what you do testifies above all the prophets. Tell us, therefore, is it lawful to give to kings what pertains to their rule? Shall we pay them or not?" And Jesus, knowing their thoughts, being moved with indignation, said to them, "Why do you call me teacher with your mouth and do not hear what I say? Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: 'this people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.'" Cf. Mt. 15:7-8 = Mk 7:6-7.

**Gospel of Thomas, Logion 100**. They showed Jesus a gold (coin) and said to him, "Caesar's men demand taxes from us." He said to them, "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, give to God what belongs to God, and give to me what is mine."  
Throckmorton, Burton, Jr. Ed. Gospel Parallels. NY. Thomas Nelson Pub. 1949.

Judas the Galilean had in 6-9 C. E. exhorted the nonpayment of tribute to Rome since not Rome but “God was their Lord” (Josephus, JW 2.118-18), a viewpoint apparently revived by his son Menahem in the 66-70 war (JW 2, 433-40). Josephus has Agrippa tell the people in revolt against Florus (66 C. E.) that not paying the tribute is “an act of war” against Rome (JW 2, 403-4).  
Carter, Warren. Matthew and the Margins. NY. Orbis Books. 2000. Page 439.

Why do they (Christians) claim, to be good, even exemplary, citizens of a regime they profess to despise? Why does Justin, for all his defiance, insist that Christians, “more readily than any other people,” pay their full share of all taxes, and that “we, more than any other people, are your helpers and allies in preserving peace”? Justin explains to the emperors that, in each of these cases, Christians intend to obey God, not the human government. As for Christians pay their taxes, Justine continues, in obedience to Christ’s own command (As for their civic behavior, Christians serve One who demands complete righteousness, whose judgment no secret act of thought escapes. God commands his people, too, to render obedience – although strictly limited and secularized obedience – to human authorities. Justin and his fellow Christians had inherited the capacity to make this distinction from the experience of Jews living for centuries under foreign imperialism. Pages 46-7. Pagels, Elaine. Adan, Eve, and the Serpent. NY. Random House. 1988.

The great Rabbi Hillel wrote: Pray for the peace of the ruling power, since but for fear of it men would have swallowed up each other alive.” *Abot 3:2*.

Because God rules over all rulers, because God calls forth from every human being a unique face of God, each human being must follow God, not Caesar. Pg. 102. Bruteau, Beatrice. Jesus Through Jewish Eyes. Maryknoll, NY. Orbis Books. 2001.

"We may gain some inkling of what God is if we attempt by means of every sensation to reach the reality of each creature, not giving up until we are alive to what transcends it . . ." - Clement of Alexandria, "Miscellanies"

**Temple tax**. Cf. 22.15–22. 24: Capernaum, see 4.13n. Temple tax, Jewish males annually paid the half-shekel tax for the Jerusalem Temple (Ex 30.11–16; Neh 10.33; cf. t. Ketub. 13.3). Some rabbinic texts state that all males over the age of twenty (i.e., non-minors) paid the tax (m. Seqal. 1.1–3); others indicate debate (m. Seqal. 1.4; b. Men. 65a). Does your teacher not pay, Jesus’ teachings may have aroused suspicion (12.6). The question would also be pertinent to Jews within Matthew’s community. 26: Children are free, Jesus, the Son, and his followers, are technically exempt. 27: We do not give offense, a lesson for Matthew’s day when Rome required Jews to pay the “Fiscus Judaicus” for supporting the temple of Jupiter Capitolina. Fish, rabbinic literature speaks of fish containing riches (b. Shabb. 15a). Coin, a Tyrian “stater,” worth four drachmas, enough to pay for two men. Pgs 32-33.  
22.15–22:

**Taxes to Caesar** (Mk 12.13–17; Lk 20.20–26). Gos. Thom. 100; cf. 17.24–27. 16: Herodians, Political group supporting the royal family, Rome’s client rulers. 17: Pay taxes to the emperor, Rome levied an annual census tax of one denarius (Lk 2.1–2; Josephus, J.W. 1.154; 2.118; Tacitus, Ann. 2.42). See “Paying Taxes” above. 18: Putting me to the test, see 4.7; 16.1; 19.3; 22:35. Hypocrites, see 6.2,5,16; 15.7; 23 passim; 24.51. 19: Denarius, a day’s wage; see 20.2n.; Pg. 40. The Jewish Annotated New Testament

Be sure that you first preach by the way you live. If you do not, people will notice that you say one thing, but live otherwise, and your words will bring only cynical laughter and a derisive shake of the head. - St. Charles Borromeo

#### **SUGGESTED READINGS:**

Links to all the books mentioned in this guide are on The Ark web site: [www.theark1.com](http://www.theark1.com)

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle A 2014. Pgs. 197-200. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](mailto:Carol.Oberfoell@theark1.com)

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle A 2008. Pgs. 161-165. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](mailto:Carol.Oberfoell@theark1.com)