

10/19/14 29 A

Whose image is this, and whose inscription?

-- That's the question Jesus asked in today's gospel when someone pulled out a Roman coin. Remember, this took place in the temple area, where no good Jew was supposed to carry Roman coins.

-- Why that was true becomes clear when we read the full inscription on the coin. In Jesus' time it would have read, *Tiberius, Son of Divine Augustus*. Yes, the Romans regarded their emperors as divine. Their coins had to be changed in order to do business in the temple area.

-- Of course, Jesus was doing more than exposing the hypocrisy of the men who were trying to trap him. He was really asking them...whose image do you bear? He was telling them, in essence, that we do have to live in this world and deal with its realities, but we owe our ultimate allegiance to God.

-- Jesus is also asking us, *Whose image do you bear?* There's a prayer I say each day. It's a prayer for priestly vocations that was composed specifically for priests. It says, of those to whom I minister, *Let them look and see, no longer me, but only you, Lord Jesus.*

-- If we grasp what Jesus is saying today, that prayer applies to all of us who claim the title "Christian." We are all called to bear the image of Christ in our lives, and people should notice that.

-- After all, we belong to a God who claims everyone as his own. As the first reading tells us, he even claims pagan leaders such as Cyrus of Persia. Cyrus did not know the God of the Israelites. No doubt he worshipped the Persian gods of his day.

-- Yet he was the Lord God's instrument in returning the Chosen People to their land. How often, over the course of history, has God used people who do not claim the title of Christian to do his work?

- The answer is plenty of times. How much more should we be instruments of God's work in our own neck of the woods. We can only do that effectively if we do our best to bear the image of Christ.
- Jesus' answer to his opponents (today we might call them opponents from the right and the left) did not give us a neat formula to tell us how figure out precisely the balance between our relationship to God and our obligations to the civil society around us.
- Much of that we have to figure out ourselves. But we do have some basic guidance from our Lord and Savior. He reminds us that we must give to God what belongs to God.
- And what belongs to God? Our first commitment...our ultimate allegiance. Yes, we have to cooperate with our community and country. We have obligations to them. (e.g., voting soon)
- But, as Christians, we are followers of Jesus Christ first. And if that commitment clearly conflicts with those other obligations, we have to say, along with St. Peter and many other saintly people after him, *We must obey God rather than human beings.*
- Perhaps we can learn a lesson by looking at a typical coin we would carry in our pocket. On one side of each American coin, we will find the words: In God We Trust.
- Are these just words on a coin? Or do they really express what we believe and live?