

## Homily for 29<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time



The gospel is again about discipleship. How should Christians live their faith in this world? So let's begin by asking the question that the gospel figures are facing in their time. What would you do if you lived in an occupied country? Would you collaborate? We British have sometimes been pretty scornful of the French level of collaboration in the 1940s. But then books like *SS-GB* and *Fatherland* have all tried to be realistic about what it would have meant for us. The film 'The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society' does the same thing. Most of us are not that brave, so how do you survive and how do you keep your pride?

The gospel today is written under the same conditions. Militant Jews of Jesus' day would touch nothing from the Romans, these were the ones who were looking for a worldly Messiah that would drive the Romans out. Others, Herod and his people, the Herodians, threw in their lot with the Romans and collected taxes for them. The Pharisees were strict on the Law but accommodated themselves to the reality of life, and Jesus like many others probably did the same.

The denarius was a Roman coin. On it was written, 'Tiberius Augustus, son of the divine Augustus, high priest.' So for Jews it was blasphemous in a number of ways, and was the reason why you had to have money-changers in the Temple to convert them into acceptable Jewish money for religious offerings. Yet it was also the coin in general daily use.

So at the root of the Pharisees' question is: are you a collaborator or not? Either answer would put Jesus in a difficult position, which is what they want.

It is of course pure hypocrisy on their part, but what is interesting is that, as so often, they proclaim Jesus to be just who he is even within their own hypocrisy. Look at what they say, and again I am afraid I am going back to the original language. What they actually say first is, "You are true" (not honest), and then, "You teach the way of truth," immediately we can hear Jesus' own declaration in John's gospel, "I am the way, the truth..." Then they say "You care for no man's opinion," i.e. you speak frankly and without fear. Jesus is always telling people not to be afraid. Then, "You believe all people to be equal." A dangerous statement under the Romans but exactly what Christians

do believe. The only thing the Pharisees could add about Jesus is his death and resurrection, which Jesus will speak about next, and which they bring about.

Jesus of course sidesteps the question. The Pharisees have produced the hated coin themselves. They have been carrying and using it, so it is clear they do not really have a question. But Jesus is already making it clear that these issues are not important to him. “My Kingdom is not of this world,” as he will say in John’s gospel, and in Matthew’s he says nothing about this himself, he refuses to answer.

All this passage comes within Jesus’ teaching about what it is to be a disciple. What is important to a disciple? These kinds of direct issues (and Jesus never denies that people should be involved in issues) can only be answered by having first decided on the deeper ones, ones that give us a real grounding for life.

Do we live in a way that is true to Christ and ourselves? Do we speak openly and in a way that is true to Christ, and without fear? Do we live believing all people to be equal?

St. Teresa of Avila, whose feast day was on Thursday said: ‘A person must walk along this path of freedom (that Jesus is fixed and embedded in our hearts), placing themselves in God’s hands.’

And as Pope Francis has said in his latest letter ‘Fratelli tutti...’ “It is my desire that, in this our time, by acknowledging the dignity of each human person, we can contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity. Fraternity between all men and women. “Here we have a splendid secret that shows us how to dream and to turn our life into a wonderful adventure. No one can face life in isolation... We need a community that supports and helps us, in which we can help one another to keep looking ahead. How important it is to dream together... By ourselves, we risk seeing mirages, things that are not there. Dreams, on the other hand, are built together”. Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travellers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all.” Once we discover how Jesus is calling each of us to live, and to live in peace, and with his courage, it does not matter so much under what regime we live.

*(The picture at the beginning is of St. Francis going to meet the Sultan of Egypt in an attempt to make peace.)*