

FR HUGH'S HOMILY FOR 29th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 2026

The gospel is always going to have a twist that brings it round from very human behaviour and speaks to the message Jesus wants to give us.

So what is happening here?

It could be a scene from a film. Two opposing sides who hate each other. Pharisees who stick very much to the Law and hate Roman rule that forces Gentile life on its subjects and then the Herodians who hold onto power by simply through doing what the Romans want.

Two groups who usually fight. So why are they united in today's gospel?

What they see is a travelling preacher who seems to have a strong following among the people. He threatens both their power in different ways. He condemns the Pharisees for the way they interpret the Jewish Law and angers the Romans as they think he will try to overthrow their power and so that of the Herodians. This preacher is of course Jesus.

So they try to trap him and show him to be a fraud in front of the people. So we hear their question about the coin, to which they think there can only be one of two answers. If he takes the Pharisees' proposition (which by the way they do not practice themselves as they pay the taxes to survive, which is pure hypocrisy) that should not pay taxes to the Roman Gentiles he is a threat to Roman rule and could be arrested, if he agrees to pay the taxes as the Herodians happily do, then he disobeys the Jewish Law and is a heretic. (As it happens Jesus knows that the Pharisees, at their best, are not bad in their belief in the Law but here in their desire to get rid of Jesus and to side with the enemy. Again hypocrisy.) What is hypocrisy but a twisting of the truth. Who is Jesus but the Truth.

Now everyone hates the taxes as they are a burden especially to the poor, so everyone is listening to his answer.

So one question with only two possible answers.

But Jesus is no fool. For all the false flattery, 'you are so truthful, you are such a good teacher, you preach the word of God and are never influenced by the desire for power,' which the Pharisees are in this case, Jesus sees the trap and the hypocrisy. How can he answer the question and at the same time preach his message?

The question is about an image. This time the image of Caesar on a coin. Jesus tosses that question aside for the falsehood it is. He is not interested in this sort of image, but another.

Now in all this scene he is looking at all around him. Those trying to trap him, the ordinary crowd, his followers and disciples. As ever he gazes deeply into their hearts and he loves each and every one of them, regardless of who they are. Why?

Because, if we go back to the start of the Bible, to Genesis, where do we find an image? This the Pharisees should know themselves.

Who is made in the image of God? Simply those he is looking at. All of them regardless. Made out of his Father's love.

What is Jesus here for? To change the hearts of all. To call all of us to God.

To help people beware the traps humanity can fall into and see themselves and all others as being in the image of God. To remind us today that this applies to us. To have a proper pride in ourselves. In fact to love our neighbours as ourselves.