

There is nothing quite like my Mom's cake. She has always baked our birthday cakes herself, with icing made from the recipe passed down from her Mom, and they are delicious. If you put ten different pieces of cake in front of me, 9 by others and 1 by her, and had me do a blind taste test, I could pick out my Mom's cake every time. When you hear a song by your favorite musician or see a movie by your favorite director, chances are that you will identify them fairly quickly. For instance, if you are a fan of movies by Wes Anderson, you could probably recognize one of his movies before you saw the credits. Why? Because artists always leave their signature in the things they create.

In today's Gospel Jesus gives a short, but powerful answer to the scribes and pharisees trying to involve him in a political controversy. They present him with a difficult political question that they think is a lose-lose scenario. By asking whether or not they should pay the census tax, they try to force Jesus to take sides in a very broken political situation. If He says that you should pay the tax, they could accuse Him of being a supporter of the hated Roman government, and thus a disloyal Jew. If He argues against paying the tax, then they would go to the Romans and accuse Him of being a revolutionary.

But Jesus is not about to be caught up in their games. As usual, He is ready to take the discussion to a deeper level. Instead of focusing on the political situation at hand, He powerfully shifts the conversation.

"Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

Jesus takes the discussion to the heart of things when he focuses on the image on the coin. He uses it as a symbol of all the worldly activity that we must be involved in to keep society going. Political realities, as broken as they are, are a necessity for living in civil society. Quite often those realities are going to be less than ideal. When we form societies in this fallen world, they are going to bear the stamp of their creators, just like that coin which

bore the image of Caesar. All that we do in society will bear the marks of our humanity, a humanity that is capable of great good with God's help, but often falls short even by its own admission. Throughout the history of mankind, over and over we see the rise and fall of various kinds of governments and human communities, all marked by that same signature of humanity, which is fallen but called to something more.

When Jesus tells us to "give to Caesar what is Caesar's," He essentially tells us that being part of society, as broken as it might be in our fallen world, is part of life. The world will try to leave its signature of brokenness and sin on us, but we are called to be agents of hope and change through God's grace. We are called to be in the world, but not of the world. The signature of the fallen world cannot be what defines us. In our current world situation, this advice is as true as ever. Yes, we should do all that we can to infuse our society with the truth of the Gospel, but the world of politics is not the most important thing, in the end.

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In the end, there is another, deeper image that Jesus wants us to recognize. *This* image is what really matters. When we look at humanity, beneath the brokenness, there is that nobility of being made in the image of our loving God. The book of Genesis reminds us that we are all stamped with the image of our Creator. Even though we struggle with sin and temptation, in Jesus Christ, God gives us grace to move beyond the brokenness of sin.

Though living in this world is unavoidable and will often tempt us with many distractions, at the end of the day we are called to give our hearts and lives to the God who created us in His image and redeemed us even when we tarnished that image. If we look within ourselves, we can all recognize that signature of our creator. Beyond those lesser things that so often shout for our attention and time, there are the deep longings of the heart which only

God can fulfill--to love and be loved, to know where we are going, to know our purpose. All of these deepest movements show us that we are not simply political animals, but people called to communion with the One whose signature we bear. We long for love, direction and meaning because our hearts bear the image of the God who is love, who calls us to Himself, and who infused this world with deep meaning and beauty which points back to Him.

God is so good that He even came down as one of us to definitively restore our humanity and call us back. In Jesus, we have the definitive answer to all that obscures God's signature in our lives. Jesus, who calls us to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves, and gives us the grace to do so!

So let us today ask which signature most defines our lives. Are we allowing the broken world to define who we are and what we spend our time and energy on? Or, are we looking deeper and letting God's signature define us? His grace calls us to what will most deeply satisfy the needs of our hearts.

Let us ask God right now to show us one concrete way in which we can love Him and love our neighbor as ourselves this coming week. *Come Holy Spirit, help us to know what step we can take to love You and share that love with those around us this week. Thank you for reminding us that we are made for this love. Amen.*