

XXIII TRINITY 2020
SERMON-SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
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"In God We Trust"...is the official motto of the United States of America and the State of Florida. The motto also appears on US coins and currency...although that hasn't always been the case.

The motto first appeared on the US two-cent coin in 1864. In 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt ordered the motto removed from the \$20 gold piece. He believed the motto was sacrilegious and cheapened God's name. Congress had to remind him only it had the authority to alter coin design and the motto was quickly restored. It wasn't until 1957 it appeared on our currency.

The coin in this morning's Gospel...most likely the Silver Denarius...was engraved with the image of Caesar. The inscription on the coin declared Caesar to be a god. The coin plays a surprising role in the Gospel...which has all the makings of a political conspiracy.

We hear a lot about the Pharisees and Sadducees...the two major political parties within Judaism. We don't hear much about the Herodians...who were loyal to Herod the Great and his descendants. Herod was the puppet king to the Romans and ultimately to Caesar and responsible for the massacre of the baby boys around the time Jesus was born. The Herodians had no legitimate claim to the throne.

The Pharisees and the Herodians hated each other...but these two archenemies formed a conspiracy against their common enemy...Jesus. They tried to trick Jesus...first by flattering him and calling him a great teacher who always told the truth...then by asking him a question he could not possibly have answered 'yes' or 'no' without serious and potentially lethal consequences.

Jesus knew what they were up to. If he said 'yes', then he would have lost the support of the people who were following him and considered a collaborator with the Romans. If

he said 'no', then the Pharisees could run off to the police and tell them Jesus was saying they were free to break Roman law and not pay taxes. He would be arrested and tried for treason...which is what eventually got him killed.

So Jesus asks the Pharisees to show him the coin used to pay taxes. He asked them to tell him whose face and name are on the coin. They replied it was the Emperor's face and name. Jesus tells them to pay to the Emperor what belongs to him, and pay to God what belongs to God.

Jesus lived up to his reputation for telling the truth. The attempt by the Pharisees and Herodians to trick him failed. They were left with no alternative but to walk away shaking their heads...probably wishing they could start the day over again.

None of us like paying taxes...but we do benefit from government programs funded primarily by the taxes we pay. Refusal to pay taxes is refusing to honor God and the government. Jesus makes it clear there is no conflict between paying taxes and meeting our other legitimate earthly obligations.

The Gospel is about putting God first in our lives...and giving him what is rightfully his...our trust...above everything else. Some pastors have resisted government restrictions placed on churches due to the pandemic. We have chosen a course at Saint Joseph Parish where we try to give God what is his and meet County health and safety guidelines.

If we ever find ourselves in a situation where we are forced to choose between God and our Country...God must be the winner in that contest...regardless of the consequences we might face for our actions.

"In God We Trust" is a good motto for our Country. While the motto doesn't make our money more spendable, seeing it on our coins and currency reminds us it is God and God alone whom we should trust first...everything else will take care of itself.

