

Although we don't always see it

We know all things are for the good of those that love God

All things in human history are either directly ordered by Him

Or they are allowed by Him

But in the end

We know that they are for our good

Even when it is difficult to see

That is our faith

To believe even when we cannot see

Our first reading from Isaiah comes at the end of the Babylonian exile

The Israelite nation had been taken from the promised Land

They were captives far from home

They did not know how long their captivity would last

Or how it would end

But at the end of their captivity

God did not raise up a leader from within

He appointed Cyrus as king of Persia

Cyrus did not know the God of Israel

He was a pagan

Yet we are told

Thus says the Lord to his anointed

Whose right hand I grasp

Subduing nations before him

Making kings run in his service

We see the hand of the Lord was upon this pagan king

Cyrus would fulfill God's plan

He would allow the Israelite nation to return home

He even helped in re-building the Temple in Jerusalem

We can deny Him

We can refuse to see His hand in our lives

But it is still there

Guiding and inviting us into conversion

Something the Pharisees had a difficult time seeing in their day

The parables we have read the past few weeks

Speaking in various ways of the vineyards and laborers

These were meant in a special way for the Pharisees

But they fell on deaf ears

They only frustrated and infuriated them

So they come up with a plan

In their minds, they see no way out for Jesus

But note they don't confront Jesus personally

They send their disciples

These disciples are accompanied by the Herodian's

The Herodian's, followers of king Herod

Both were Jews

As different from the Pharisees as republicans and democrats today

**The Pharisees thought there should be no compromise with the
Roman rulers**

This was the only way they could retain their identity

The only way the Pharisees could retain their power and authority

The Herodian's believed it was best to cooperate

To win the favors of the foreign rulers

But in Jesus, they find a common enemy

So they come with false praise

Teacher, we know you are a truthful man

You are not concerned with anyone's opinion

You do not regard a person's status

The opinion of others and their social status

These were the benchmark of the Pharisees

But they are false gods

So their argument is doomed to fail from the beginning

Now their trap

Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?

If Jesus says pay the tax

He loses the respect of the Jewish faithful

Those that are turning to him more and more

If he says no

You do not need to pay the tax

He can be accused as a political insurgent

He could be turned over to the Romans and put to death

Jesus sees right through their false pretensions

Why are you testing me, you hypocrites?

Show me the coin you use to pay taxes

Whose inscription is on it?

It is Caesar's inscription

It is Caesar's coin

Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar

But give to God what belongs to God

We know which country a coin belongs to by the inscription

Ours have various images of founding fathers

Other influential political figures

Mexico, Canada, Europe all have their own

We cannot use our money to buy things in other nations

We convert them to local currency

Our souls are stamped as well

But in the image and likeness of God

We distort this image by sin

And we are called into conversion as well

So the image in our soul is remade as it is meant to be

We can be blind in our day as well

Our lives are a complex mix

We are in the world

But not of the world

It is easier to live the life of rules and regulations

This is the life of the state

We get our tax bills

We have speed limits

We build according to regulations

These may be demanding

But at least we can hopefully understand them

Even if we don't agree with them

The problem comes when we try to live our faith lives by the same standards

We see religion only as a set of rules

This is a dangerous path

First, it can lead to presumption

We follow the rules

And God will owe us

We will be able to make demands on Him

Thinking we can earn salvation

Or it can lead to becoming scrupulous

We can begin to judge ourselves and others simply on the external

We can become very religious

Even if only as we see fit

As we understand it

Our prayer becomes reciting words

While the heart is far from God

The Pharisees fell into these traps

Even when Christ warned them

They could not admit they might be wrong

So they reject Jesus himself

We are in need of their example

Or we might think we are not in need of conversion

That we never need to make an adjustment in our thinking

Jesus is often hard on the Pharisees

But he is just as demanding on his followers

Do you not yet understand?

Again and again he asks similar questions to his disciples

They are asked to give up their vision

We are asked to give up our vision

To accept God's vision

Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar

But to God what belongs to God

St Paul helps us grasp what this is

Our work of faith

Labor of love and endurance in hope

This is what we owe God

Not external things

But our very selves