**Morning Praise @ Home 22nd October 2023**

**Opening prayer**

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

**Confession** Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and**

**repent.** **Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us**

**from our sin.** **Renew a right spirit within us** **and restore us to the joy of your salvation,** **through**

**Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen** cf Psalm 51

**Absolution** May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image

to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### Bible Reading Matthew 22: 15 – 22

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**Reflection from John**

A poster inside a Church once asked: IF YOU WERE ON TRIAL FOR BEING A CHRISTIAN WOULD THERE BE ENOUGH EVIDENCE TO CONVICT YOU?

It gets to the heart of the challenge posed in today’s Gospel reading where the Pharisees were trying to trip Jesus up on the challenge of being loyal to God and a citizen of the state.

I think there is also something here about living in this world as it is - while longing for and praying for the world as it should be.

Now - living in the world as it is, is always going to be a challenge for a Christian. Life is messy. There are issues which are confusing as we live in this tension between what is now - and what is not yet.

The reading begins with a rather odd mixture of people, Pharisees and Herodians, and what unites these otherwise opposed groups is a common desire to destroy the credibility of Jesus. So they arrive at the place where Jesus is teaching and then - almost like a lynch-mob - they push their way to the front.

‘Teacher’ they call out, and the crowd fall silent.

‘Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth,’ And, with a gesture towards the crowds, they add, ‘you show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?’

Jesus was trapped: if he said ‘no’ then the Herodians would tell the authorities that he was inciting civil disobedience. He’d be tried and probably executed. But, if he said ‘yes’, then the crowd who’ve seen enough of Roman rule - who’ve seen their wealth stripped and shipped off to Rome and who are desperate for someone to take a stand - are going to feel really let down. They are going to feel betrayed when they hear this popular figure advocate falling in line with the authorities saying that, when in Jerusalem, you should do as the Romans do.

So what Jesus does is he asks for a coin. It has Caesar’s head on it - and he adds, rather enigmatically, ‘Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’

A coin - that has Caesar’s face on it and an inscription which says words to the effect that Caesar is God. Now this was so offensive to the Jews (breaking the first of the ten commandments) that to even be in possession of such a coin was tantamount to trafficking in graven images. If it was a Pharisee who was found to have such a coin, then Jesus will have revealed the hypocrisy of those who were giving a false impression of religious purity.

But what does Jesus actually mean by ‘Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s and to God the things that are God’s.’?

It could have been an oblique reference to Psalm 24 which says that the Earth is the Lord’s and everything in it. Render to God that which is God’s may mean to give him everything because there is nothing in this world that is not God’s. But where does that leave Caesar? Does he get anything?

Jesus clearly intended to leave his hearers with a challenge to work through. He didn’t say YES and he didn’t say NO. They, and we, have to work that through for ourselves.

We know that the Pharisees had got it wrong. They believed that you were better off withdrawing from the world because - that way - you wouldn’t be compromised. But they were compromised. Even having withdrawn, they failed to maintain the religious purity that they tried to preserve.

God doesn’t call us to be separate from this world. He calls us to be salt and light. We have to live the Christian life in the world; not in some artificial ghetto where our beliefs are never challenged.

That is not God’s way. God’s way - is to engage with the world. God did not choose to stay separate from the world he created. He entered it. He experienced its cruelty. He felt its pain. That is God’s way. God took our flesh. Jesus was God incarnate - in flesh - and he shared the dirt and the dross and the depths of our nature.

And Jesus calls us (actually all of us) to live out our Christian life in this world even though - sometimes - our high ideals may be compromised by the realities of day-to-day life. He calls us to live in a world that is not yet the Kingdom of God at a time in which his will is not yet done on Earth as it is in Heaven. But - despite things not yet being as they should be - we are called to live out our faith with integrity and honesty; not believing ourselves to be anything other than we are.

We are called to live out our faith in the world so that the world witnesses our struggle to relate what we believe to the way we live our lives.

If we allow ourselves to be vulnerable rather than give the impression that we’ve got all the answers, then - perhaps - people might be more attracted to the faith we’re trying to live out and - maybe - they might discover something about God.

You see, it’s not just about paying taxes: It’s about how to live a life that is faithful to God in a world that barely knows him.

It’s about refusing to keep our faith in a box that we unpack for an hour on Sunday but trying to relate it to the whole of our lives and then working to put it all together.

Because - at the end of the day - the image you bear (the image imprinted in you) is not Caesar’s – but God’s.

We bear God’s image. We belong to Him and are called to live for Him in this world…. Always with an eye to God’s future.

**Affirmation of faith**

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

**We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

**This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

**Prayers of intercession**

God our Father as so many within our world seem intent on destruction OR domination we earnestly pray that all leaders awake to their own frailty and seek the rule of the pen over the sword and a compassion for all over self- interests.

We pray for all victims of terrorism, war and other forms of senseless violence AND that in the hearts of all perpetrators YOUR true peace may be allowed to enter.

We pray for all engaged in humanitarian work in many parts of the world and for members of our own armed forces.

May you bless us with tears to shed for all those suffering with pain, hunger, homelessness and rejection so that we may reach out our hand to comfort and help them.  
Lord, in your mercy - **'Hear our prayer’**

We pray for our own country and its people, for our King, his ministers and all who hold authority and power - that through Christ’s love and mercy all may strive in seeking what is right and just for everyone AND at a time of uncertainty we pray for tolerance and harmony between all citizens regardless of ethnicity, religion and status.

We remember especially those who work in our National Health Service and the increased demand placed upon all its services. We pray that ways will be found to alleviate the present situation to the benefit of patients and staff alike.

Lord, in your mercy - **'Hear our prayer’**

We pray for those in most need within our own families and neighbourhood, the sick, the lonely and the housebound. We pray for all those who care for them and we ask that you bestow on them your gifts of patience, compassion and understanding.

We also pray for those known to us who are sick or lonely or in some other special need at this time as we share a brief moment of silence together . . . . . . . .

As we have named them in our hearts so let them feel your presence and friendship in their lives.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

**The Lord’s Prayer** As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

***Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come,******Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

**Closing prayer** God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be, that you may live and work to his praise and glory, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**