

+
AMDG

Proper 24A, October 22, 2017

“Whose likeness is this?” With this simple question, Jesus confounds those who would trap him into taking sides in a political and religious dispute. Instead he offers insight into our own true natures.

Today’s Gospel reading would have been a good opportunity for me to remind us all that, “the earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it.” That we should remember this as we fill out our pledge cards, prayerfully discerning what part of God’s blessings we will give back to him in gratitude. And, I still urge you to do this.

But, in reading and reflecting on today’s message, my mind kept going back to the first place in the Bible where we find the words we hear in Matthew, Genesis 1:26, “Let us make humankind in our *image, according to our likeness.*” I wonder how many of those hearing Jesus question about the coin, would have thought about God’s creation of humankind. We were made in the image and likeness of the Creator.

Let that sink in for a moment, my dear sisters and brothers, WE WERE MADE IN GOD’S IMAGE AND LIKENESS...

This has startling implications, which the prophets and Jesus have called us to consider again and again. Being made in the image and likeness of the Creator, we are called to act like God. Jesus’ very incarnation was meant to underline this reality of our being. Jesus is the exemplar for our earthly existence. As, St. Athanasius put it, “God became man, that man might become more like God.

In being called to act not like gods (lowercase g), those who lord their authority over others for self-gain like Caesar, but like The God who’s manner is repeated throughout the law and the prophets, and made real for us in Jesus - we were called to serve as God’s agents, God’s partners, and God’s co-workers, exercising dominion over creation not as an act of power but rather as an act of stewardship and extending to all the abundant life God wishes for all. Living lives of lovingkindness, forgiveness of enemies, welcoming strangers, extending God’s justice and mercy to all.

Notice that in today's Gospel, despite the fact that Jesus' opponents carry a coin with a graven image and confession of Caesar's divinity, Jesus doesn't accuse them blasphemy nor disloyalty. Instead he labels them hypocrites, those who have literally taken to wearing a false, likeness. So perhaps the charge against those trying to entrap or discount Jesus then or now is best understood as amnesia, for they have forgotten their primary identity as God's children and stewards, as those made in the likeness of God and charged to act like the God we see in Jesus. Those are too often our lives, as well, living not in the image and likeness of God, not being the face of Christ within our walls and beyond our doors. But, rather living our lives as if they were our own, following our own agendas, pursuing our own goals, seeking our own pleasure. But, even as we go through our lives moving from one thing to the next, letting things pass us by, we are every so often stopped short by something - perhaps it's a beautiful sunset, or a piece of music, or our own suffering, or the suffering of others. We're stopped short in our busy lives and slow down enough to be present to the miracle of our own existence, our own belovedness in God. Those moments can pass us by, and we can quickly forget about them, or maybe they catch our attention enough to make us realize that we're skimming over the surface of the depths of our miraculous lives. Maybe we stop just long enough to realize, "Wow, life is so much more than my aches and pains, my errands and schedule, my likes and dislikes, my fears and resentments. My life is so much more than all that." And, that is the beginning of spiritual awareness, the beginning of repentance. In order to live our lives as we were created to do, we must first stop and notice those lives - these very moments in which God holds us in Created mystery. It is in the very moment, not in the past, not in the future, not in fear or regret, it is in the very moment that we have the opportunity to touch the immediate intimacy of our likeness with the Creator. When we are in that very moment, we are also given glimpses into the image and likeness of God in the faces we encounter in our lives. We encounter the love and support of God as we face the challenges we are presented. And we are encouraged by the Spirit in the works of love, mercy, and forgiveness that we allow ourselves to experience. But, it can only happen when we let go of what we think is

important, let go of the things we use to numb our lives, slow down and open ourselves to the goodness of God's glory of the concrete immediacy of this moment.

So, I call us all today to remember, "in whose image and likeness you are made." In the very immediate intimacy of your momentary existence - this moment, this space in time - how clearly, how intensely do you recognize that amazing fact? How much of your life is dedicated to the experience of your belovedness as a child of God, and how much of your daily life is dedicated to living out your calling - in acts of unqualified acceptance, extravagant generosity, unequivocal forgiveness, unbridled love? In your coming week I call upon you to take a moment to let go of all you think you are and all you think is important, and abandon yourself into the loving kindness of the God in whose image you were created.

Let us pray.

Father,

I abandon myself into your hands;
do with me what you will.

Whatever you may do, I thank you:

I am ready for all, I accept all.

Let only your will be done in me,
and in all your creatures -
I wish no more than this, O Lord.

Into your hands I commend my soul:

I offer it to you with all the love of my heart,
for I love you, Lord, and so need to give myself,
to surrender myself into your hands without reserve,
and with boundless confidence,
for you are my Father.