

Collect: ALMIGHTY AND EVERLASTING GOD, in Christ you have revealed your glory among the nations: Preserve the works of your mercy, that your Church throughout the world may persevere with steadfast faith in the confession of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen.

Lessons: Isaiah 45:1-7

Psalm 96:1-13

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Matthew 22:15-22

Sermon: Can you imagine what it would be like to live your life always being on guard and being wary of anyone in a position of authority? What would it be like having to move from place to place trying not only to do your work, but staying away from those who want to do you harm? Would you be comfortable knowing that you are being spied on and reports are being filed on you regularly? What would it be like knowing people in authority are wanting to not only capture you, but to put you to death?

The authorities, the religious authorities primarily the Pharisees, are your enemies. They see you as a thorn in their side that must be removed. They see larger and larger crowds following you. They hear and see that you are healing people, you are cleansing the lepers, making the lame to walk and restoring to right minds those who are demon possessed. They hear that you have fed five thousand people with five loaves of bread and two fish. They see you teaching in the synagogues in towns and villages and also at the synagogue in the temple.

They know that you observe the holy holidays, they have seen you at Passover celebrations, in Jerusalem, two years in a row. They know you are

a learned man with a sound knowledge of the Torah and all that is in the Hebrew Bible (*We call it the Old Testament*). They have watched you disobey religious laws. You heal people on the Sabbath. Your disciples don't wash their hands before eating. You forgive people of their sins and you don't require sacrificial offerings.

Gamaliel, a highly regarded religious teacher, a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin Council, who had also taught Paul, sternly warned the authorities that you might be doing the work of God. So, they should leave you alone. If it wasn't the work of God, it would soon fizzle out on its' own and the religious authorities wouldn't be blamed. But if it was the work of God it would continue on.

Gamaliel is said to be one of the two greatest rabbis in Jewish history.

Not requiring sacrifices as sin offerings and disrupting commerce at the temple when you cleansed the temple by throwing out the money changers and sellers of animals and fowls have put your life in the bullseye to be eradicated, gotten rid of. You accused the authorities of turning the temple the house of prayer into a den of thieves. I often use the metaphor: swap meet.

What do the people think of you? That you are a prophet. You are Elijah, one of the greatest Jewish prophets and you are the resurrected John the Baptist and later, on Palm Sunday they will say you are the anointed one (the Messiah), their king (*Only kings got anointed*).

Who are you? You are Jesus, a Galilean, a Nazarene, the Good Shepherd and you are a rabbi who changed the religious life in the Holy Land.

You say you are the Son of Man.

I have asked you to imagine yourself as a man being persecuted by the Pharisees. We don't hear a lot about how difficult the life of Jesus must have been. The Gospels focus on his ministry and the works he did among the people. Every now and then it shows us a little glimpse of Jesus being human as we are. Remember his anger as he cleansed the temple, causing chaos as he lashed out with a small whip, overturned tables and drove the vendors out. There is also the time he was hungry and spotting a fig tree near, he

thought he might have some figs to eat. But there were only leaves on the tree, no figs. In his frustration he cursed the fig tree and it withered up and died immediately.

Today's Gospel illustrates what I have been talking about. Some Pharisees approached Jesus. They acknowledged that he is a rabbi who is sincere and teaching the word of God. However, they didn't come to praise him, they came to entrap him. They asked him if it was proper or lawful to pay taxes to the emperor

Now the Jews didn't like the fact that the Romans were the conquerors and in charge of the government. They also didn't like the fact that the Jewish people were taxed and that money sent to Rome.

So, they asked Jesus if it was proper to pay taxes to the emperor/Rome or not? Jesus asked them to show him the coin used for the tax (*Jesus was aware that they were trying to entrap him*). They showed him a Roman coin and Jesus asked them whose head was on it. They replied, "The emperor's." So, Jesus told them to give Caesar what was due him, pay the tax and give to God that which was God's.

If Jesus had said not to pay the tax, I think that it would have been reported to the Roman authorities that this rabbi was telling people not to pay the tax or that he disapproved of it. Then the Roman authorities would have confronted Jesus, possibly punished or imprisoned him. He would certainly be a person they watched and kept tabs on.

The scriptures don't really tell us about the frustration Jesus must have dealt with. Do you think this may have been a reason that Jesus prayed so often? Do you think he may have asked God to give him the strength to face another day and to help him endure the days to come?

Much of and even more of what I offered in this sermon can be helped along by reading: **JESUS: man, Not Myth** by Peter D. Snowden, an Episcopal priest for 40 years. Amen.

(This paperback book can be purchased from ALIBRIS books for \$1.45 (used) to \$44.81 (new).

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