

October 18, 2020 "Gotcha" Homily: In journalistic circles some thirty or forty years ago, a term was introduced to the American public, and still is very much in use today in the media. The term is "gotcha". It is an effective weapon in the arsenal of print and television reporters, whose primary objective in an interview at times is to discredit, embarrass and possibly destroy the reputation of someone of prominence: an elected official, an actor, a CEO of a major corporation, among others. The late reporter for the news magazine show, "Sixty Minutes", Mike Wallace, was renowned for damaging the reputations of many of those he interviewed for the program. He often exposed them as charlatans.

Those who come to Jesus in today's gospel (Mt. 22:15-21), the Pharisees and the Herodians, try to lure him into their trap with flattery. Jesus hears nothing but pleasant words from their mouths. He is addressed as "teacher", praised as "a truthful man", and singled out as one who is fair-minded and impartial. "And you are not concerned with anonymous opinion, for you do not regard a person's status." (Mt. 22: 16)

But their treachery is transparently obvious. If Jesus denounced the census tax, he would run afoul of the civil authorities. If he pronounced himself in favor of the detested tax, he would make himself unpopular with the Jewish people who considered the tax a form of extortion.

Jesus was fully aware of their malice. "Why are you testing me, you hypocrites?" (Mt. 22:18) As we learned in previous controversies, Jesus is not so easily taken. He always has the upper hand in a dispute with his adversaries.

What lessons may be derived from today's gospel?

First, Let us ask ourselves if we are honorable in our intentions or do we have a dark, hidden motive for damaging another's reputation?

In the immediate aftermath of a scandal involving a well-known Protestant Evangelist over thirty years ago, I was interviewed by a local reporter from WRGB. He asked for my response to the revelation that a noted preacher was found in the company of prostitutes by the police. Acting in a spirit of naiveté, I replied that as a Christian I have a duty to forgive others, show a degree of empathy for the downfall of a highly regarded preacher and pray for him and his suffering family. Clearly the reporter was not satisfied with my response. Later that evening I was singled out as a harsh critic of the fallen preacher, a virulent critic of the Catholic Church. The point I wish to make here is that the reporter had an axe to grind with the Church in which he, the reporter, was baptized, and used me to strike back at his enemy. He failed to act honorably.

Jews never made an image of God, not only because the Law of Moses forbade it, but also because that image of God was to be found elsewhere, not on the face of a coin, but in the soul of the human being. In his best-selling Book, "The Life of Christ", the late Bishop Fulton Sheen offered a reflection on this gospel narrative. "The coin bore the image of Caesar, but what image did the questioners bear? Was it not the image of God Himself? It was this image He was interested in restoring".

We must not let politics dominate our life. In addition, politics can be no substitute for our Christian faith. Many of my former high school classmates, who are friends of mine on Facebook, have either discontinued practicing the faith or have abandoned it altogether. But what is noteworthy is that they have not abandoned religion. Their religion is the political theater, and they are zealously passionate about their role as disciples of their chosen candidate for political office. Their sacred text is likely the platform of their favorite political party. But unlike our Eternal, Risen Lord, Jesus Christ, politicians come and go and are usually forgotten in time. In 1972, I voted in the presidential election in which the Democrat George McGovern competed against the Republican, Richard Nixon. Their names are mostly unfamiliar to the so-called millennial generation. They have long since passed away.

And on a day known only to the Lord, such will be our fate as well.

Those in journalism who relish the thought of exposing others in a “Gotcha” moment must always keep in mind that those they interview are bearers of the Divine image and must be shown some respect. We bear the image of God and not of the roman emperor. Saint Paul writes cautionary words of warning: “Since we once bore the image of the earthly one, let us also bear the image of the heavenly one”.

Amen!