

“The Soul in Everyday Stuff: Coins”
Matthew 22:15-22

How do we feel about money? What is our relationship with it?

If we are honest, it's complicated. On one hand, money is a neutral tool - a currency of exchange that allows us to care for our families and build communities. On the other hand, history and headlines are littered with stories of money being used for violence, power, exploitation, and greed.

We see this clearly in the Netflix series *Dirty Money*. In one episode, we learn about "defeat devices" installed in cars to falsely pass emissions tests - prioritizing profit over the very air we breathe. Another episode follows a payday loan operator who built a predatory empire by charging astronomical interest rates, hiding behind a Native American tribe he didn't even belong to. These aren't just stories of "bad apples"; they are symptoms of a human vulnerability: our tendency to let money become our master.

We see this tension in our national landscape as well. In his book, *Poverty, by America*, Matthew Desmond writes: “This is who we are: the richest country on earth, with more poverty than any other advanced democracy... Almost one in nine Americans - including one in eight children - live in poverty.” Why do we struggle so much? Because money hits something deep within us: **our fear of scarcity**. Jesus stepped directly into this fear. In today's Gospel, he is confronted with a "hot button" issue: the Roman tax. To understand the gravity of this, we have to realize this wasn't just a political debate; it was a trap.

Let's listen to Matthew 22:15-22

<https://youtu.be/FYIRNThkNPg?t=144>

Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. ¹⁶ So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one, for you do not regard people with partiality. ¹⁷ Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” ¹⁸ But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? ¹⁹ Show me the coin used for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius. ²⁰ Then he said to them, “Whose head is this and whose title?” ²¹ They answered, “Caesar's.” Then he said to them, “Give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's.” ²² When they heard this, they were amazed, and they left him and went away.

The Pharisees (who opposed Roman occupation - patriots) and the Herodians (who supported it - loyalists) joined forces to corner Jesus. They asked: “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”

If Jesus said "Yes," the people would see him as a traitor to Israel and a collaborator with their oppressors. If he said "No," the Romans would arrest him for sedition. But Jesus looked past the trap and addressed the heart. He asked for a coin - a denarius.

Now, imagine the scene. They are standing in the Temple. According to the Law of Moses, engraved images (idols) were strictly prohibited, especially in the holy precincts. Yet, when Jesus asks for a coin, his challengers reach into their pockets and pull one out. They were carrying an idol in God's house.

The coin bore the head of Caesar Tiberius with an inscription that called him the "son of the divine Augustus." By simply holding the coin, Jesus exposed their hypocrisy. They were already participating in the system they claimed to despise. Then comes the radical pivot. Jesus says: *"Give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's."*

We often interpret this as a 50/50 split - give some to the government, give some to the church. But to a Jewish listener, this was a revolution of the mind. They knew Psalm 24: *"The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it."* Jesus was asking: **Whose "image" is on the coin?** Caesar's. So, let him have his metal back.

But whose "image" is on YOU? Genesis tells us we are made in the image of God. Jesus was reminding them that while they might owe a tax to an empire, their *allegiance*, their *soul*, and their *very being* belong to God. No tax system or empire can claim the territory of the human heart.

He was inviting them out of the "culture of scarcity" and into the "kingdom of God," where justice and compassion are the norms. Money, in this kingdom, is meant for exchange and blessing, not for hoarding or manipulation.

Lynne Twist, founder of the Soul of Money Institute, challenges us with this: "I challenge you to hold money as a common trust that we're all responsible for using in ways that nurture and empower us, and all life... Move the resources that flow through your life toward your highest commitments."

This week, I invite you to examine your relationship with money.

- Where has fear or scarcity taken root?
- Where have you allowed the "image of Caesar" (status, power, security) to overshadow the "image of God" in your life?

Ask God for healing where there is fear. Ask for the grace to let money flow through your life not as a master, but as a tool for love.

I want to invite you to think of a time in your life where money was used to give life and to consider the joy that comes from that.

We close today with a beautiful illustration of this "flowing grace" in the children's book *Extra Yarn* by Mac Barnett. It is a story about a girl with a box of yarn that never runs out—because the more she gives away, the more she has to share.

<https://youtu.be/imS62OwhsbA>.

May we live with that same spirit of abundance. Amen.