

Gospel Reflection by Laura Orcutt

Matthew 22:15-22

I think this event may be defined as one of the first documented shark tanks. The term shark tank envisions a place of clever people bent on tricking people out of their money and giving bad advice about things like buying, selling, or investments. They are considered dangerous and cunning people. Usually if you call someone a shark, it is because you disapprove of them for their trickery in money. Those that survive a shark tank stay on. Supposedly the best. It is a game of survival.

in this gospel reading, people have surrounded Jesus. He is already known as a gifted speaker. In this event, Jesus is being set up by two huge and powerful entities, sharks, as they may be, the Pharisees and the Herodians. The Herodians were Hellenistic Jews hostile to Jesus. Some believe the Herodians were soldiers of Herod Antipas, while others argue they were probably a public political party friendly to Herod the Great. Both the Pharisees and the Herodians are set on trickery to fool Jesus and make a mockery of who he is, to engage in debate and quarrel over an issue. Jesus, however, is far sharper. In this scene with Jesus, the Pharisees enter the realm of money to try to cunningly entrap him with their question about taxes. Jesus questions them, whether they realize it or not, on worshipping idols, the money and the person's image on that money, the emperor. In those times, an emperor was often thought to be godlike by the people he rules. To the Jewish people under his rule, it was oppression...oppression to not be able to live their lives to honor God, instead of being subjugated to the rule of the emperor in a falsehood of worship.

The Herodians wait. Jesus challenges them. He first calls them all hypocrites to put things in perspective and asks for a coin. He goes on the offensive by clarifying that image, that idol, the money and the emperor's head on the money, are nothing compared to God. He sets them straight by saying return that which is given to the person who gives it. Money goes back to the emperor. All things God created belong to him and will go back to him.

Now for the best part. No further debate. No cunning return in remarks or rebukes. If there was such a thing as a light bulb back then, it must have come on to those who were there. The shark tank dissolved. No need to fight and win the argument to prove to be the best. The Best rose to God's glory and they all walked away truly amazed. Can you think of and reflect on the last time God truly amazed you?