Homily for Sunday, October 18, 2026



I suppose if we look at the first reading, the second reading, and the gospel as a whole, we might conclude that each of them is about discernment. Although the word "discernment" is used in everyday language, it originally had a spiritual meaning. Discernment is not just about the ability to judge well or to distinguish truth from error. It's more about seeing what aligns with God's truth. When you discern any significant decision in your life, what you're really doing is turning to God's Word and the Holy Spirit to guide you. When Jesus said, ***"Seek first the Kingdom of God,"*** or again when he said, ***"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also,"*** I think it's his way of saying, "Discern what is God's will."

God's will usually isn't an easy choice nor is it usually our first choice, but it will ultimately be a life-giving choice. By the way, when you discern, don't limit yourself to simply asking, "What would Mom or Dad do in this situation?" or "What does the Church want me to do?" Those are too limiting. The alignment is not with Mama or the Church; it's always an alignment with God. We hope Mama and the Church are also doing their own discerning!

In that first reading the Prophet Isaiah is writing at a time when the Israelites, God's Chosen People, were enslaved in a foreign land—Babylon. But there's hope. They are about to be liberated, but the liberation will come from an unlikely source. They will not be led back to the Promised Land by a pillar of cloud by day nor a pillar of fire by night as they were in the past. No. They will be freed by a *pagan* king, of all things. Isaiah tells the people that God has anointed King Cyrus of Persia to defeat the Babylonians and let the Israelites return home. Can they discernment that? Can they see the hand of God working in a man who didn't even know God? Referring to King Cyrus, God says, ***"I call you by your name, though you do not know me."*** That story reminds me that when we discern, we cannot put limits on who God can and cannot use to show us God's

ways. Some people are only given to us for a day or even an hour. Yet they make a claim on our lives in such a way that, upon later reflection, we just know God must have put them on our path for some reason.

Paul says something similar when he writes to the Thessalonians. He says to them, ***"For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, because our message of the Gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction."*** Paul is praising this little Christian community. To paraphrase his words, he says, "When God's word came to you, it wasn't just words. Something happened inside of you. What I think happened to you was that the Holy Spirit filled you with conviction." In short, Paul is praising the Thessalonians for the way they discerned God's word and put it into action. It's not enough to discern God's will. It also requires courage to live it, and they did that.

Then we get to the gospel and the famous story of the Roman coin. The Pharisees and Herodians have collaborated to trap Jesus, in the Temple of all places, and during the Passover festival of all times! The stakes couldn't be higher. The Pharisees and Herodians are diametrically opposed to each other; they hate each other's guts. The only thing these two groups have in common is their hatred of Jesus, and this has made them strange bedfellows.

Jesus has done his discernment—his homework; they have not. Jesus has discerned that the most important thing is to promote the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of mercy, justice, and peace. It's a kingdom that has at its center love of God and love of neighbour. It's Jesus' only agenda. In fact, that's the first words out of Jesus mouth according to the Gospel of Mark. On Day 1 of Jesus' public ministry he says, ***"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the gospel."*** I've never counted it, but apparently Jesus say more than 50 time in the gospels that the Kingdom is not in a palace or above in the sky or beneath the sea, but "at hand."

Just the fact that Jesus mentions a kingdom, means that from Day 1 his head will be on a wanted poster. Everything after the first chapter in Mark is one great big plot to do away with Jesus. The religious leader (including the Pharisees) and the civil leaders (including the Herodians) will not tolerate a king other than the one of their choosing. So, they set a trap. If Jesus says yes to the legitimacy of

paying taxes to the hated Romans, he will win the favor of the Herodians but be hated by the Pharisees. He'll be accused of being a Roman collaborator by his fellow Jews and probably stoned to death for his disloyalty. If he says no to paying taxes to the emperor, he'll be reported for treason and punished, even crucified by the Romans as an insurrectionist. So, he'll either be a collaborator or an insurrectionist. The trap is well planned.

His answer is brilliant because it comes from a place of discernment. When he says, ***"Give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's"*** it is not a compromise. He's not separating Church from state. He's not dividing the world up into the "sacred" on one side and the "secular" on the other. He's not saying, "Go to Church on Sunday, do your duty before God, and do your own thing the rest of the week."

He's getting people to reflect on what really is Caesar's and what really is God's. It's not a compromise. The only compromise in this story comes from the Pharisees and Herodians. The compromise they were living with was one they lived with every moment of their lives. Engraved on one side of the Roman coin, which the Pharisees and Herodians carried in their pockets everywhere they went, was the inscription "Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus" and on the other side it was written "Pontifex Maximus" (high priest). Those trying to discredit Jesus were discredited themselves by carrying coins considered blasphemous. And they were carrying these coins in their own pockets in the most sacred site of all—the Holy Temple.

The two sides of the coin showed how two-faced the Pharisees and Herodians were. They were living a compromise every time they reached into their pockets to retrieve a coin. There was no compromise in Jesus. That is why he carried no coins himself and had to ask *them* for a coin. Jesus could have said a lot more to reveal their hypocrisy. He could have easily shamed them or got these two groups of men, who already hated each other, to fight themselves. He doesn't do that. He walks away giving them a few words to think about, something to discern. He also leaves them with their dignity.

It's clear where they placed their allegiance and where Jesus placed his. The opening line of Psalm 24 says, ***"To the Lord belong the earth and all it contains."*** There is never a compromise or middle ground that Jesus points us to, simply to

“keep the peace.” There is only a higher ground where we “live the truth.” And only prayerful discernment can get us there.

Fr. Phil