



BULLETIN INSERTS

October 18, 2020 – Pentecost 20 (A) Whose Image? – A Reflection

As the U.S. approaches Election Day, November 3rd, Sermons That Work is teaming up with The Episcopal Church's Office of Government Relations and four writers from across the Church to reflect on the Christian call to participate in our common life together through voting.

“Whose image do we bear?”

I grew up hearing this gospel preached as evidence that the sacred and the secular should be separate things, that the separation of church from state is a matter of authority. The Church has authority over spiritual matters and the State has authority over civil matters. But Jesus' answer to the question about taxes isn't as simple as dividing our lives and loyalties. He reminds us that God is Lord of *all*.

The coin belongs to the emperor—his image is all over it. But – God is owed the things that are God's—*all* of the things that bear God's image. The people listening would know that humans were created in God's image (Gen 1:26), including Caesar. Giving to God what is God's means giving all that we have and all that we are to God.

What are the implications of bearing God's image? What does it mean for how we behave, including in the political realm? I once heard a priest ask, “If you were arrested and charged with being a follower of Jesus, would there be enough evidence to convict you?” Can the same be said of us as of the Thessalonians? That our faith is so clear to the world around us that there is no need to speak about it since we live it out daily?

Bearing God's image, being baptized followers of Jesus, has direct political implications. My bishop has said, “You cannot be a person of justice and of truth and uphold the dignity of every human being without engaging yourself at some point in the political life of the human race. That's where the struggle, the collective struggle, happens.”

Christian advocacy and witness aren't partisan—our active participation in the ways our common life is ordered through every level of government is part of how we bear God's image in the world, part of the evidence of our faith. It is part of how we follow the Way of Love in the world.

Is there enough evidence to convict us as being followers of Jesus, as bearing God's image? The evidence will be found in how we welcome the stranger, visit those in prison, care for the sick, feed the hungry, and love all of our neighbors. The evidence will be in how we stand against evil and dismantle systems of oppression. It will be in how we work together for the common good by creating policies, programs, and systems that promote the freedom and flourishing of all of God's creation.

May there be enough evidence to convict us all. Amen.



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This reflection was written by the Rev. Meg Wagner, who serves on the staff of the Diocese of Iowa as the Missioner for Communications, Reconciliation, and New Initiatives, and is co-founder of the Beloved Community Initiative in Iowa City, a ministry focused on racial justice, healing, and reconciliation. Find more resources for election engagement at iam.ec/ogrcivicengagement.