

Does anyone here this morning trust me enough to hand over some money? I'm looking for a coin from someone and a note. Come on, dig deep!

What do we have?

Okay...a £1 coin, that's good. And a £10 note...that's even better.

And whose picture are we guaranteed to find on every English coin and note. The Queen. Yes. Or more accurately, the ruling monarch.

And here is a difficult question, does anyone know what it always says on the coin around the Queen's head?

"Elizabeth II, by the Grace of God, Queen, Defender of the Faith"

The image of the monarch has routinely appeared on one side of a coin since the 17<sup>th</sup> century...sometime back in the sixteen hundreds.

Does anyone know when it became normal to have the Monarch's head on an English bank note? Well that didn't become the norm until 1960. And its only Bank of England notes that bear the Queens head. Scottish and Northern Irish notes do not.

And its become an important subject in recent times – deciding whose head will be on the other side of a note.

So Winston Churchill will replace Elizabeth Fry on the £5 note in 2016 and Jane Austen will replace Charles Darwin on the £10 in 2017.

As long as we have plenty, we may take them for granted (especially if we prefer plastic), but the money we carry in our pockets is of really important significance isn't it. Through it, we're able to buy our food, pay our debts, help those in need and so on. And the monarch's head indicates the power of the state and in the English case, the connection between the Church and the State – for the Queen is also, as the coin declares, the Defender of the Faith. In English currency, Sovereignty and Religion come together. To some degree, it might be why the English are so reluctant to accept the Euro. It just goes against the grain.

Well, we'd better get back to our Gospel today: 'Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.' A saying which in the King James Bible format has slipped into common usage, especially if you are a taxpayer. Or as we heard it today – 'Give therefore to the Emperor the things that are the Emperor's and to God the things that are God's'.

Coinage during the Roman occupation under which Jesus was living was also very significant. We are told by Matthew and by Mark and Luke in their Gospels, that the questioners were trying to entrap Jesus. Interesting, that entrapment is still illegal today. They fully expected that Jesus would oppose giving tax to Caesar and they would then be able to hand him over to the Governor of Roman

Judea, Pontius Pilate. In fact, we know the end of this story already, because they will hand Jesus over to him. And ironically, in Luke's Gospel we are told that Jesus is accused of opposing the payment of taxes.

Whichever Roman coin they presented, it would bear the image of a human leader, who had declared himself 'divine'. And this was both idolatry and blasphemy for the Jews. So you can see the dilemma they have tried to place Jesus in.

What Jesus's comment teaches us, is that the coin bears Caesar's image, so give it back to him freely. But likewise, and here is the rub for the Pharisees and spies, we human beings are made in God's image and likeness and therefore should freely give our whole selves back to him.

St Paul in the letter we have also heard today picks up a similar theme. He writes, that the new Christians in Thessalonica 'became imitators'. They shaped themselves 'in the image' of Paul, Silvanus and Timothy who are writing to them and in this way, became 'an example' to others.

And how did they shape themselves? What did they imitate? Well, Paul gives us three things – their 'work of faith', their 'labour of love' and their 'steadfast hope in the Lord Jesus Christ'. These are the three hallmarks of the Christian. Faith, Love, Hope...central to Paul's literature, as we know from elsewhere.

What Jesus is saying, is that you cannot reduce God's identity onto a coin. It will always be just a coin. But, that God has in fact marked us human beings in a similar way. God has made us in his image and likeness. And as Paul writes, we Christians can, if we really follow Jesus, be an example to others. God has put his identity onto us; he has chosen us for this purpose. He seals us Christians with the power of the Holy Spirit and full conviction so that in spite of any persecution that comes we can live out the Christian life with joy! And through our example, if it is truly lived out, others will want to know God. Paul writes: 'you know what kind of people we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord'.

Well, lets turn back to our coin and our note. I take a look at it and its very straightforward. I recognize it straight away. This is a ten pence, this is ten pounds. If the hallmarks of Christianity are faith, love, hope, lived out with joy and deep conviction. Can these be seen easily when people take a look at us as individuals or take a look at the Church? And we Christians are always under the microscope, people waiting to catch us out, just as they tried to entrap Jesus.

What we need to remember is that God has chosen us and he has given us his Holy Spirit for this work. The work of faith, the labour of love, the steadfast hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

And to him be the glory!

Amen.