

LECTIONARY REFLECTIONS PROPER 24, YEAR A  
Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost, October 18, 2020  
The Rt. Rev. Susan B. Haynes

**Exodus 33:12-23**

**Psalm 99**

**1 Thessalonians 1:1-10**

**Matthew 22:15-22**

**Exodus 33:12-23**

As you will recall from last week, Moses has just finished interceding with God on behalf of the Israelites following their great sin of worshipping the golden calf (a violation of the first commandment against having other gods before God). In today's reading God charges Moses with responsibility for the Israelites, telling him to "bring up this people." Moses uses this charge as an opportunity to bargain with God. Moses wants God to show him His ways so that Moses will know God and find favor in His sight. We all can understand that when we work for someone we want that person to favor us and to be pleased with who we are and what we do. Moses then reminds God that the Israelites are God's people too and that Moses does not necessarily have sole responsibility for them. To some extent, Moses challenges God. God responds to Moses with love and mercy, promising that He will always be present to Moses and that Moses will find rest. He indicates to Moses that His favor rests with Moses because He knows Moses by name. This knowledge suggests that the relationship is intimate and special. God then promises to show God's self to Moses. But notice that the promise is not for an entire revelation. Apparently, to see God's face in its entirety would be too overwhelming, even to Moses. So God devises a plan whereby Moses is shielded from the total presence of God. When God prepares to pass by Moses, He will shelter Moses in a rock and cover Moses with His hand, so that Moses sees only His back as He passes by, but is protected from the overwhelming totality of God's presence.

***We don't often think about what it might be like to be in the total, complete presence of God. Like Moses, that would be overwhelming for us. However, we long to see the face of God and we long for His complete presence; our souls seek that. Can we take some comfort in the reality that God is revealing God's face to us in stages, and protecting us from the overwhelming force of His totality? Do we understand that God knows us by name and thereby His favor is with us? Can we rest in that confidence? Can we keep seeking?***

**Psalm 99**

Psalm 99 places in proper perspective the overwhelming greatness of God. In the presence of God, people tremble and the earth shakes. God is over all the people on earth – every last one of them. His name should be confessed. Moreover, He is a kingly God who loves justice and establishes that justice along with equity and righteousness. The psalmist mentions Moses, Aaron and Samuel as priests who call upon God's name and who keep His decrees. In return, God answers them out of the pillar of clouds. The psalmist is clear that God answers them but that they must still be accountable for and face

the consequences of their evil deeds. This just, equitable and righteous God does not dismiss accountability. The psalmist exhorts us to keep in our remembrance and perspective the greatness of God and the need to worship Him.

***How wonderful to worship a God who loves justice and establishes that justice along with equity and righteousness! These are soothing words for a fractured world. Our job is to keep God's commandments and to call upon His name for help. He will be faithful and answer. He will also call us to be accountable for our actions. For which of your own actions is God calling you accountable?***

### **1 Thessalonians 1:1-10**

From this Epistle to the Church at Thessalonica, we gain recognition of just how powerfully the word of God can be manifested in communities. People receive the word with power, with joy and with full conviction that God will bring about change. This is done, as it was in Thessalonica, even in the midst of persecution. Paul is especially pleased that the Church has turned from serving idols in order to serve the one true God who raises His Son from the dead!

***Think about your own church community. How might those around you recognize that you have truly received the Word of God? Is there joy? Is there power? Is there conviction and belief that God raises from the dead? Yes, we are in a difficult time. The pandemic can be experienced as a type of persecution...certainly a hardship. Do we receive the Word of God even in the midst of that? Are we truly waiting for Jesus?***

### **Matthew 22:15-22**

In the Gospel reading, we return to the idea of *image* and *face* that we picked up in Exodus. In this reading, Jesus associates image with belonging. Something ***belongs*** to the entity whose image it bears. The scene begins with the setting of a trap. Jesus is in the Temple and the Herodians and Pharisees have come to ask him a question, but they are really setting a trap. They want to know if it is lawful to pay taxes to the emperor. It seems like an innocent enough question, but it is fraught with danger. The Herodians support the Roman occupation and would therefore support the payment of the tax to Caesar. They want Jesus to oppose the tax, so that they can persecute the Pharisees (and other Jews) for treason in their failure to pay the tax. The Pharisees are zealous about religious law. They oppose the tax, not because of the occupation so much, but because of the special coin required to pay the tax. This coin bears the image of Caesar (referred to as "divine Caesar"). To be in possession of such a coin would be in violation of the first and second commandments. The Pharisees want Jesus to support paying the tax so that the people would see him as a Roman sympathizer who is against the keeping of God's commandments. Jesus responds by setting a trap of his own. He asks for the tax coin to be produced, and surprisingly, even though these Jews are in the Temple where it is a violation of the law to be in possession of this coin, they manage to come up with one. Jesus asks whose image the coin bears and the people respond that the coin bears the image of Caesar. Jesus states that the coin then belongs to Caesar and should be rendered to Caesar, thereby sanctioning the paying of the tax. He then goes on to admonish to the people to give to God what belongs to God.

***What does belong to God then? What should we render to God? What bears His image? In Exodus, Moses was prevented from seeing the full image of God. However, we know that in our own creation, God imprinted His image on us. We are made in His image. We bear His image. We belong to God! We***

*can look in the mirror and see the face of God. We can look on our fellow human beings (all of them) and see the image of God. We can look at all of creation and see the image of God. That is what we should give to God – our very selves and all of Creation! That is what belongs to God! Have you thought of how you might give to God that which belongs to Him?*

**COLLECT:**

*Almighty and everlasting God, in Christ you have revealed your glory among the nations: Preserve the works of your mercy, that your Church throughout the world may persevere with steadfast faith in the confession of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*