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Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 18, 2026

"Shine like lights in the world as you hold on to the word of life." I feel that this exhortation accompanying the alleluia of the readings for the Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time is truly a call to profound self-examination. Do I live merely from religious "beliefs," or do I live from the conviction of being centered in and thus radiating the light of Christ?

I would venture to say that holding on to the liberating good news (word of life) and shining its light is not about moralistic efforts or striving to "do" good works. Rather, it is about allowing the presence that dwells at our core to radiate outward,

unhindered by the obstacles of the mind. For this to happen, we must become increasingly aware of the shadows and beliefs that dim the light we carry within.

The Gospel of Matthew 22:15-21 places us at the very heart of one of these shadows. The Pharisees and the Herodians, political enemies united only by their rejection of Jesus, approach him with a trap finely woven by the ego: "Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?"

This is the classic dualistic trap of a polarized mind that seeks to divide. If Jesus says yes, he becomes a traitor to his people and an accomplice to imperial oppression; if he says no, he becomes a political seditionist, an easy target for Roman execution.

The question is logically clever, but Jesus' response is far wiser, because it helps dissolve all illusions of separation between God, neighbor and oneself.

Today, we live in a toxic global climate. The contemporary "Caesar" wears many faces: polarized political systems, exclusionary nationalisms, dehumanizing economic powers and wars. Dominant narratives push us to take sides, hate our adversaries, and seek salvation in ideologies. The ego needs an enemy to exist, and paradoxically, in an era of unparalleled technological connectivity, our relationships are more fragmented than ever.

Jesus disarms this illusion from a place of deep contemplation. He asks for the coin and questions: "Whose image and inscription is this?"

Jesus is not dividing the universe into two separate realms (the secular and the sacred). In fact, that is exactly the point: Jesus never "divides." Rather, he is putting everything into its proper perspective. The coin bears the image of Caesar; it belongs to his economy and his temporal systems. We participate in the world, we pay taxes, we vote, and we seek social justice, yet our *being* carries the image and likeness of God.

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When we are centered in being, our responses and actions flow from the life of the kingdom, not from the works of a "dualistic empire." This centeredness gives us the clarity to fulfill our obligations without falling into divisions.

This understanding brings us to the core of the contemplative experience, expressed in the first reading (Isaiah 45): "I am the Lord, there is no other; outside of me there is no God." God is the very ground of all reality, the being in whom we all live, move and have our existence. Political crises, no matter how terrifying they may be, do not have the final word on reality.

When we live disconnected from this divine ground, we give to Caesar what rightfully belongs to God: our inner peace, our hope and our sense of identity. We allow ourselves to be swept away by panic and fear, which lead us to denial, disconnection and even (self) destruction.

The call is to live from a contemplative experience, and to do so, the word invites us to confront our own hypocrisies, just as Jesus did with the Pharisees. Do we reduce God to political stances, believing God is a member of our party? Do we demand a peace that we fail to maintain within our own families or communities? Do we denounce global violence while canceling and judging those who think differently than we do? How much of our "zeal for justice" is merely the ego seeking to be right and feel superior?

Hypocrisy is born from forgetting who we are and whose image is engraved upon our souls. To "remember," we need silence.

To "shine like lights in the world" means to consciously inhabit and make transparent who and what we are. Living from the wisdom of Jesus means anchoring ourselves in the love of God — the ground of all reality — and working for justice not from the ego's rage that seeks to destroy "Caesar," but from compassion. By recognizing that only love sustains the universe, our lives can truly hold on to the word of life, returning to Caesar his divisions and illuminating our surroundings with the light of the kingdom.

Today, set aside 20 minutes of silence to anchor yourself in the God whose image and likeness you reflect; God's desire is to shine a light on the entire world through you.

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