

Homily Notes
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Sunday, October 16, 2012

Idols and Idolatry

In our Gospel we hear Jesus asking "Whose image is on the coin?" The word "image" is a very specific word. In modern times we have lost the original understanding of "image." In Old Testament times "image" meant more than just a picture of something, an image meant that whoever the image depicted was made present in a very real way.

The image of Caesar was put on the money as more than just a picture of Caesar, like George Washington on our dollar bill, it was a way of making Caesar present in his kingdom. The image of Caesar on the money and in statues was a real and true presence of Caesar that had to be adored and worshiped in the same way as Caesar himself. Many Christians lost their life because they wouldn't worship the statue of Caesar. The Romans believed that Caesar was really present in the statue, it was more than simply a statue.

Many non-Catholic Christians accuse the Catholic Church of idolatry because we have statues and stained glass windows. As if they mean the same thing as a statue of Caesar. They often quote the 2nd Commandment that states. *"You shall not make for yourself a graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: you shall not bow down to them or serve them"* Exodus 20: 4 - 5

By this definition nearly every Christian, Catholic and Protestant alike, would be breaking this commandment on a regular basis:

Taking a photo, making a painting or carving a statue **of anything would break the 2nd Commandment**...the commandment says "any likeness of anything in heaven, on the earth or in the sea." This would include trees, fish, people, animals, rocks, water..anything.

So, does this make the whole of the world sinful??

I think the key to the 2nd Commandment is in the term "image" and the part that says, "You shall not bow down to them or serve them."

Does a vacation picture make the person that is in the picture truly there? Of course not.

Do you believe that the statue of St Thomas in the back or the stained glass window of Mary above the altar is really and truly making her present? Of course not.

So, then, do Catholics "worship" statues? I certainly hope not. The goal of a statue in our Church is much like a picture of your family or a statue of George Washington, they are constant reminders of your family or of our first president. It is the same with a statue of a saint or of Mary, they are a reminder of God and how He has worked in our world.

If anyone worships a statue of a saint they are certainly wrong and committing idolatry and breaking the 2nd Commandment.

Are there Catholics who use statues of the saints in an idolatrous way? Yes, there are some people who use statues in a superstitious and idolatrous manner, what they are doing is absolutely wrong and sinful. However, I believe these are the exception and not the rule. In most cases people use statues, icons and stained glass exactly how they are meant to be used, as a reminder of God and of those who have served Him so valiantly.

The saints are a type of Hall of Fame for Christians. We use their statues to remind us that holiness is attainable. The stained glass window of St Thomas Aquinas in our bell tower and the small statue of him in the back of the Church are a constant reminder to me that I must be serious about my faith and the study of theology, just as he was.

