

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

Our Gospel lesson this morning comes at the end of a string of debates between Jesus and the two main Jewish religious sects of His day: the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees and Sadducees kept asking Jesus questions, not because they were curious or wanted to know more about the faith, but to try to trap our LORD in His words (Matt 22:15). That’s why the Pharisees asked Jesus: “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” (Matt 22:17). Whether Jesus said yes or no, He would get in trouble. So Jesus says both: “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s.” The Pharisees marveled at what Jesus said. Then the Sadducees, who didn’t believe in the resurrection of the dead, asked Jesus about the woman whose seven husbands died. Who would she be married to at the Resurrection? But the Sadducees don’t know the Scriptures or the power of God. There is no marriage in the Resurrection! Marriage is an institution for this world. And as far as the Resurrection of the dead, God says: “I *am* the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” “I am,” not “I was.” He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. When the crowd heard this, they were astonished at Jesus’s teaching. The Pharisees and Sadducees tried to trap our Lord in His words, but Jesus always got the better of them.

Then we come to our Gospel text for today. The Pharisees heard how Jesus had silenced their enemies, the Sadducees, and so they wanted to take another shot at our LORD, trying to trap Him in His words. A lawyer asked Jesus: “What is the greatest commandment?” To choose one thing is not to choose another. Whichever commandment Jesus picks, the Pharisees could

make it look like He is downplaying the others. But in all wisdom, Jesus answers that the greatest commandment is to love God, and the second greatest commandment is to love our neighbor. Jesus summarizes the Law in the same way God summarizes the Law in Deuteronomy. The greatest commandment is the principle behind all the commandments: love. The teachers of the Law were no match for our LORD who gave that very Law.

But then Jesus turns the tables and decides to ask the Pharisees a question: “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” Jesus is throwing them a softball. The Pharisees were the religious rulers of the people, the teachers of God’s Law. They knew the Scriptures about the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed one promised in the Old Testament. And in the Old Testament, the coming Christ is called the son of David. The LORD, through the prophet Nathan, said to King David: “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish His Kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of His Kingdom forever” (2 Sam 7:12–13). It was commonly understood that the Messiah would be a physical descendant of King David, as the prophets testify. In Jeremiah 23[:5], for example, we hear: “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king.” The Pharisees knew the Messiah would be a physical descendant of King David. They even knew from the Prophet Micah that the Messiah would be born in David’s hometown of Bethlehem.

But then Jesus asks a follow-up question: “How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls Him Lord?” Jesus quotes King David in Psalm 110: “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet.’” That is, the LORD God says to David’s Lord, the Messiah, “Sit at my right hand.” David recognizes that his descendant is greater than himself.

If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son? If David calls the Messiah Lord, how can the Messiah be David's descendant? A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master (Matt 10:24). A son is not above his Father. A prince is not above a king. A descendant is not above his ancestor. So how can David's son also be David's lord?

And no one was able to answer him a word. The Pharisees weren't stupid. They understood what Jesus was saying, but any counterargument they could think of would go against Scripture. The wheels were turning in their heads and they could see the implications of what Jesus was teaching. They could sense what King David was getting at: David's Son is also David's Lord. The Son of David and the Son of God are the same person, our Lord Jesus Christ. If they disagreed with Jesus, they would show disagreement with God's Word. If they agreed with what Jesus is saying, then their entire world would be turned upside down. They would have to admit that this man, Jesus, is also God. And if Jesus is God, then they have to listen to Him, serve Him, worship Him. Their whole theological system would come crashing down, and so the Pharisees just remained silent.

You see a similar attitude today in how people approach Jesus. Many want to stay neutral about Jesus by ignoring His claims, or they see him as nothing more than a good teacher, one prophet among many, a wise guru with some pithy sayings. C.S. Lewis puts it well with his "trilemma"---there are only three options. Either Jesus is a lunatic, a liar, or the Lord of all. There's no tame option. All are extreme. When we listen to what Jesus says and hear what He does, we can only come to one of three conclusions. Either Jesus is crazy, a madman who thinks He's the Son of God. Or he's lying about who He is, which would make him a wicked deceiver in league with the Devil, the father of lies. Or Jesus really is who He says He is: David's son yet

also David's Lord, a descendant of David, yet at the same time the God of the universe. Such a huge claim allows no room for neutrality.

“What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” The Pharisees remain silent, not able to answer a word. We as Christians, however, are called upon to speak. We believe, and so we also speak (2 Cor 4:13). As St. Paul says in Romans 10[9–10]: “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” The Holy Spirit creates faith in our hearts, which we then, as the Church, confess before the world. We proclaim that Jesus is Lord and we proclaim everything included in that reality, everything the LORD reveals to us in Holy Scripture.

Every Sunday in the Nicene Creed, we confess what we believe about the Triune God. Every day, we confess the truths of the Apostles' Creed, the faith into which we were baptized. We believe and so we confess that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is our Lord, who has redeemed us lost and condemned people, purchased and won us from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that we might be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. We don't remain silent like the Pharisees, not answering a word. No, we confess the truth about who Jesus is and what He does and we proclaim that message to the entire world!

“Nor from that day did anyone dare to ask Him any more questions,” at least until His trial a few days later. Jesus had put the Pharisees and the Sadducees in their place too many times. They would no longer try to openly trap our LORD in His words. That was too risky.

Instead, they would plot to have Jesus put to death. This whole exchange occurred at the beginning of Holy Week. Jesus had already entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, riding on a donkey. He would still pronounce woes against the scribes and Pharisees and speak about the destruction of the Temple and the End of Days. The chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the High Priest and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill Him. Our Lord was led before Caiaphas, the High Priest, for a sham trial. He remained silent before His accusers, until the High Priest said to Jesus: “I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.” Jesus said to him, “You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of Heaven.” The High Priest tore his robes and said: “He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need?” (Matt 26:57–68). It was determined that Jesus would be put to death. Our LORD was crucified for telling the truth about Himself. David’s Son yet David’s Lord, was stricken, smitten, and afflicted for us. The Son of Man and Son of God bore the awful load of our sin. The Lamb of God was wounded for us sinners and sacrificed to cancel our guilt.

David’s LORD became David’s Son for this very purpose: that He might bear the sins of the world, including our sins. Only God could cancel the sins against Him, and the only way He could do that was by becoming man that He might suffer the punishment we deserve. Yet because He was God, the grave could not keep Him. Our LORD freed us from the debt of sin, crushed the Devil’s head, and conquered death. He rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven to rule all things at God’s right hand, where He will reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet (1 Cor 15:25; Ps 110:1). Soon every eye will see Him coming on the clouds of Heaven, even those who pierced Him, and all the tribes of the Earth will wail on account of Him (Rev

1:7). Then our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the root and descendant of David, will finally triumph over all His enemies and we who endure will reign with Him for all eternity (2 Tim 2:12).

“What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” Our Lord continues asking you these questions, even today, in the words of Holy Scripture. There’s no avoiding these questions. To not answer, like the Pharisees, is to give the wrong answer. “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” In Holy Scripture we find the answer: Jesus Christ is both Son of God and Son of man, the LORD of the universe who became man to die for our sins and rise again from the dead, bringing us with Him from the grave. There, in Holy Scripture, we learn how to confess with our lips the faith God the Holy Spirit has worked within us. In Christ Jesus, we are enriched in all speech and all knowledge as we wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain us to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:5–8). In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.