

- The Malice, spoken of in the Gospel, is defined as the intention or desire to do evil. For the last few Sundays we have listened to Jesus fire his verbal rocks against the Scribes and the Pharisees. We remember Jesus told them, “Tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the Kingdom of God before you.” The Scribes and the Pharisees here represent the Establishment and they are not accustomed to anyone challenging their authority in this way. This is an example of someone speaking truth to power.
- For all their outward holiness, when pushed, the Pharisees were vindictive just like the rest of us. They went off and they plotted how they would entrap Jesus. They attempt to disarm him by using a familiar strategy. They try to flatter him. “Teacher, we know that you are a truthful man and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. And you are not concerned with anyone’s opinion.” That tactic works against the rest of us because we don’t see the spear coming at us. So, lots of us lower our guard when we hear compliments. This is nectar to the honey bee.
- But then someone says, watch your back! Jesus has got this. He says, “Why are you testing me, you hypocrites?” Jesus is very wary of them. Then Jesus uses a Roman coin to make his point. He concludes with this: “Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God.” This is what Jesus means. Give to Caesar that which bears his image, but give to God that which bears his image as well. Scholars tell us that the Roman coin probably bore the image of the Emperor Tiberius, with the inscription, “Tiberius Caesar, Son of the Divine Augustus.”
- The problem with me, with all of us, is that we are easily distracted by shiny fleeting things. Give me a few twinkling lights at Christmas and I am hooked. In front of shiny things and twinkling lights, I consider the things of God to be dull and boring. I prefer to sell my soul to the highest bidder. If someone can give me a greater reward than God, then I will sell my soul to him. We see proof of that all over the place. We’re always searching for the quick buck. We want to win the lottery and win millions. We say, “What’s in it for me?” We want things, and we will do whatever it takes to get them. And integrity has nothing to do with it. I say “I love the Lord,” but when something shiny comes along I love that instead.
- The thing I hate about God is that He won’t leave me alone. He is always calling to me. I wish He didn’t because He makes me have a conscience. Jesus does not respond with a clever dodge. He responds with confrontation. The world is not divided into one part for God and one part for Caesar. We proclaim that all creation is under the dominion of God. And that we are all made in God’s image. The voice of God speaks to Church and State the same. God even uses the pagan Emperor Cyrus. Without knowing it, he became God’s anointed one. He became God’s instrument in setting free the exiles from Babylon. Cyrus responded to God’s plan when the Pharisees refused to do so. Rather than admit the truth, the Pharisees, the holy ones, they cheated, and they killed the messenger. We remember that that was the gospel story a couple of Sundays ago.
- So, what do I do when I realize that I have left the path? I realize that I am off center. I have strayed from the Christian way. I am not on a journey to God but instead I have

gone off to search for the treasure in the field all by myself. I will do anything to get it, even sell my soul to the Devil. If I could just get this one thing I would be happy forever. If I could acquire this treasure I would never need God again.

- Jesus is dying on the cross. His disciples are gathered around and everyone is crying. Peter looks up and notices that Jesus seems to be calling him, “Peter, come here!”

Immediately Peter rushes over to the cross, only to be hit severely over the head by the roman guard. He gets on his feet again and wants to go back when he hears Jesus calling again, “Peter, come here!”

So, again Peter tries to climb the cross to get to his Lord, when the roman soldier draws his sword and chops Peter’s arm off. Peter is getting a little annoyed. He decided to go back, but again Jesus calls to him. The roman guard can’t believe that Peter is trying yet AGAIN to climb to the cross, so he chops off another arm. Peter is now covered in blood and demented from the blow to the head and he wants to give up. Jesus croaks one last time, “Peter, please, come to me!”

By now, the roman guard is tired of chopping limbs, so he lets Peter go. The faithful disciple struggles to climb the cross without his arms and after a long while he finally arrives at his Lord’s side. Hurting and suffering and bleeding, Peter looks into his Master’s eyes and asks, “Yes, Lord. What is it?” Jesus smiles lovingly and looks off into the distance as a weak smile plays across his face, “Look Peter, I can see your house from here!”