



With words and silence

Study four



Here is the man, by Antonio Ciseri, c1870



Can you recall a moment when you had to speak up for what you believed was right - even when it was uncomfortable or risky?

What gave you courage?

Give to Caesar what is Caesar's

(Read Matthew 22:15–22)

The religious leaders set a trap for Jesus, disguising hostility as flattery. Rather than responding with anger or force, Jesus engages them in conversation - turning their challenge into an opportunity for discussion and reflection.

Their question about paying taxes to Caesar is a political minefield: say yes and alienate the people; say no, and risk Roman wrath. By asking for a coin and posing his own question, 'Whose image is this?', Jesus exposes their hypocrisy and reveals a far deeper truth about allegiance.

Jesus does not evade the issue, nor does he strike back at his opponents. Instead, he uses this conversation to reveal the

limits of earthly authority and to affirm God's ultimate sovereignty. His calm, thoughtful words disarm those who sought to manipulate him, transforming a trap into an opportunity for truth to be spoken.

In a world where power is often defended or challenged through force, Jesus shows that truth spoken wisely can be a more radical and lasting act of resistance. Jesus won't be manipulated by power or trapped in false choices. Lent invites us to discern the same; how to live faithfully in a world that constantly divides our allegiances.



What strikes you about how Jesus handles this attempt to trap him?

What might it mean today to 'give to God what is God's'?

How can we remain faithful when political or cultural pressures pull in different directions?

Jesus and Pilate

(Read John 18:28–38)

Pilate, the Roman governor, embodies worldly power. In John's account of Jesus' story, this is less about whether the legal charges against him will stick, and more about Jesus' concern with Pilate and his shifting attitude, after a rather vague response from the Jewish leaders to his opening question. This seems to be more a conversation with Jesus than a trial.

Pilate has the authority to release or condemn yet seems strangely powerless before Jesus. He seems reluctant to trust the word of the priests, so takes Jesus inside his palace where he can have a conversation with this man who has been condemned

to death. And it circles around the question of truth. Jesus speaks of a kingdom not of this world, and Pilate replies with weary cynicism, 'What is truth?'

Jesus doesn't argue or defend himself - his very presence is the truth Pilate cannot grasp. In him, truth is not a concept but a person, steady and fearless in the face of lies. Lent reminds us that following Jesus means learning to bear witness to truth, not by shouting louder, but by living with integrity.



Why do you think Pilate seems both intrigued and afraid of Jesus?

What does this passage teach us about the nature of truth?

How can we bear witness to truth in quiet, steadfast ways?

'True fasting lies in rejecting evil, holding one's tongue, suppressing one's hatred, and banishing one's lust, evil words, lying, and betrayal of vows.'
(Saint Basil the Great)

'Lent is a time of renewal for the whole Church, for each community and every believer. Above all it is a time of grace.'
(Pope Francis)

Jesus and Herod

(Read Luke 23:8–12)

For a long time, Herod had wanted to see Jesus; not necessarily to understand his teaching, but to be entertained with signs and wonders. But despite the many questions he throws at Jesus, silence is the response.

Herod's curiosity eventually turns to contempt, as he mocks Jesus before sending him back to Pilate.

Sometimes, silence speaks louder than words. In refusing to argue or perform for Herod's amusement, Jesus denies him the satisfaction of control. Whilst a heated argument might have escalated into spectacle, silence maintains dignity,

integrity, and a quiet defiance that unsettles those who wield authority unjustly.

This silent conversation between Jesus and Herod reveals the power of restraint in the face of oppression. Jesus communicates through what he withholds, showing that true authority is not expressed through noise or display but through a steadfast faith.

In Lent, we're invited to listen for that quiet strength, the courage to stand firm and let truth speak for itself.



What do you make of Jesus' silence before Herod?

When might silence be the most faithful witness?

How can we cultivate the kind of strength that doesn't rely on control or approval?

Summing up

Before the powers of religion and empire, Jesus speaks - and at times refuses to speak - with unflinching integrity. He will not be manipulated, dazzled, or silenced into falsehood. His authority comes from truth rooted in love. As disciples, we too are called to live in that truth, even when it costs us comfort or reputation. The way of the Cross is not the way of dominance, but of quiet, fearless obedience to the truth.

Think about later

Pay attention this week to situations where truth feels compromised - in conversation, at work, or in community life.

Ask yourself: What would it mean to live truthfully here?

Pray for wisdom to respond with both courage and grace.

A closing prayer

Lord Jesus,
you stood before the powers of this world
with courage, integrity, and peace.
Teach us to speak truth in love,
to know when to be silent and when to act,
and to follow your way of humble strength.
Amen.

