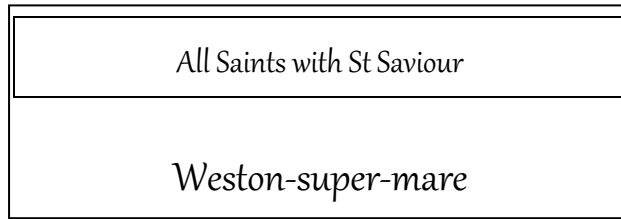




Arms of St Saviour



Arms of All Saints

19th October 2023

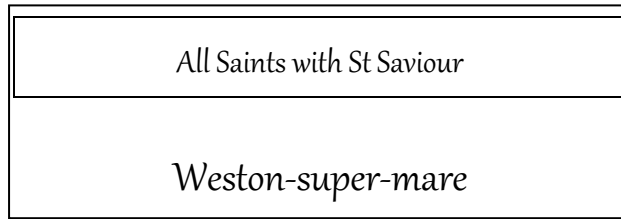
Dear friends,

Sunday's gospel, in which Jesus' enemies try to entrap him by asking whether they should pay tax to Caesar or not, is often read as making a distinction between politics and religion. There is Caesar's world and that of God. Priests should keep out of politics and stick to spirituality. But this to misunderstand what Jesus is saying. Every human being is made in the image of God and so belongs to God. For Christians, politics is building the *polis*, the community, in which God's own children can live in dignity and happiness, as we await God's gift of the heavenly city, in which all politics will be finished and, thanks be to God, there will be no more party conferences! Isaiah shows God immersed in the great events of his time, the rise of Cyrus, the Persian ruler who transformed the political map of the Middle East and enabled the exiled Israelites to go home. Religion cannot be reduced to politics, but it has consequences for how we understand the point of politics.

So what is this clash between Jesus and his enemies about? They give us the clue: *'Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality.'* They contrast two ways of seeing the world: God's true way, and a human way, in which everything is viewed through the prism of wealth and status. Jesus's opponents are caught up in that human way, speedily producing Caesar's coin from their pocket, although that image would have polluted them.



Arms of St Saviour



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If we see the world through the spectacles of status and money, the poor disappear. Etienne Grieu SJ wrote: *'A world dominated by competition engages in a formidable task of classification, not only of performances but also of people. Right at the bottom of the chart are those who are not efficient enough. They thus become invisible to others, as they are unable to demonstrate their usefulness in any of the various exchanges we take part in... They also feel humiliated because they scarcely can have the means to say who they are or to make people notice the unique treasure they bear.'*

We are all, in varying degrees, bifocal. Sometimes we are bewitched by the Caesars of our time, the wealthy and the famous, and lose sight of the beauty of those who do not count.

With love and prayers,
Fr Brendan