Deacon Randy Perkins
Isaiah 45: 1, 4-6
First Thessalonians 1: 1-5b
Matthew 22: 15-21

TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
EPIPHANY CATHOLIC CHURCH
Louisville, KY, USA
October 18, 2026

Deacon Randy shows a $20 bill)

What is the value of this bill? ($20)

He wads the bill into a ball.

Ok, now, what is the value of this bill? ($20)

He drops the bill on the floor and steps on it.

Ok, now, what is the value of this bill? ($20)

Interesting. It's still worth the same amount—regardless of whether it looks perfect and pretty and clean or if it's beaten up, worn out, misused, trampled on, or dirty—it's still worth just as much.

Because we recognize that its value, the value of this bill, isn't derived from its outward condition or appearance but rather from the image it bears. It bears the imprint of the U.S. Treasury, and we have faith that the Treasury will honor that bill.

It's interesting that we can see beyond all the wrinkles and wear and tear and still recognize that it's worth just as much!

Are we just as able to see past our own flaws—our own wrinkles and wear and tear—and acknowledge that our value is no less because of them?

Are we just as able to see past others' flaws, their wrinkles and wear and tear—and acknowledge that their value is no less because of them?

This $20 bill is our modern-day version of Caesar's coin, the coin the Jews showed Jesus in today's gospel. To provide a bit of context, when they asked Jesus whether it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, they weren't asking a genuine question about the relationship between church and state. They were trying to trap Jesus. In the days of the Roman Empire, Caesar claimed to be God, or at least *a god*, and paying taxes was a statement of loyalty to the empire and, arguably, an oath of loyalty to Caesar as god.

So, if Jesus had answered, "No, don't pay Caesar because I'm God and not Caesar," he would have been guilty of treason and theft. On the other hand, if He answered, "Yes, pay your taxes," he would have enraged *even more* of the Jews

who were so opposed to the pagan Roman Empire and believed that paying taxes was a sign of worshipping Caesar.

But, as usual, Jesus didn't fall for the trap. Instead, He responded with a question, "Whose image is this and whose inscription?" and then dismissed it, "Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and repay to God what belongs to God."

Jesus' words beg the question, "What belongs to God?" I think that we'd agree that the answer is clear: Everything God created, beginning with you and me and every human being!

To use the coin analogy, we bear the image of God. That was the point of Jesus' message: You bear the image of God, not Caesar, and you should value yourself accordingly!

We know this, but yet, we still have a tendency to value ourselves and others as if we all bear the image of the U.S. government, like a $20 bill.

It's so easy for us to lose sight of our inherent human value and to instead value ourselves and others based on our outward appearances. We become consumed with how clean and crisp we look on the outside, how much economic and social value we add. We forget that our value is based on the image we bear. Our value is based on our being imprinted with the image of God, and we are all priceless!

But, like this $20 bill, life has a way of wearing on us. Things happen.

So many young people today struggle to recognize their value. They don't see where they fit, how they belong. Society tells them the lie that their value is based on how they look, how popular they are, how much stuff they have, and how much money they can make. Is it any wonder so many are crippled by depression and anxiety because of what they view as their imperfections or failures? Is it any wonder that the most recent statistics tell us that more than 20% of teenagers have contemplated suicide? They forget, or even worse, never learn, that their value is based on the image they bear, not their rips and tears.

The same can happen as we get older. We don't produce as much as we think we should; we don't work or make enough money; our kids grow up and move on without us. Our mobility decreases over time. We find ourselves reaching a stage of life where we're again becoming dependent on the help of others. We label ourselves "burdens," and conclude that our lives have lost value. It's easy to forget that our value is based on the image we bear, not our wear and tear.

Sometimes, our damage is self-inflicted: We make some poor life choices, we do things that hurt the people we love, we develop addictions and compulsions. We tell ourselves that we're worth less because of the things we've done or the people we think we've become. It's easy to forget that our value is based on the image we bear, not our wear and tear.

Some of us have other kinds of rips and tears from life—divorce, estrangement from families, loss of our loved ones, physical or mental illnesses. And we think that the scars of those conditions somehow decrease our value. It's easy to forget that our value is based on the image we bear, not our wear and tear.

That is a radical message! And that's the message inside today's Gospel. Our value isn't determined by society or by other people or even by our own measure. Our value is determined by the one whose image we bear! Jesus isn't concerned with all those kinds of ways we like to use to measure human value. Jesus doesn't value us any more or less because of our outward appearance. Jesus doesn't value us any more or less because of how much economic or social benefit we add to the world. Jesus loves us unconditionally and values us immeasurably because we are God's creation. In fact, Jesus determined that every human being ever created is worth His dying for!

So, as we go out from here today, let's remember the message of today's gospel, both in terms of our own personal value and, just as importantly, in terms of every human life out there: We're not worth more because we sparkle and shine, and we're not worth less because we're beaten up and battered. We are valuable, even priceless, because we are made in God's image. Our value is based on the image we bear, not our wear and tear.