

Lent, Day 23  
Monday, April 1, 2019

Revelation 13:11–18

I'd like to think that I don't, and have never, bowed to peer pressure. I suspect that I have, in fact, done things because of what others think or for fear of a particular ramification. We are social creatures, so social pressure is a reality of our lives.

John's vision reminds us that social pressure impacts the way we live our faith too. He describes a second beast (now putting on our map the dragon, the beast, and, now, the second beast) appearing. This second beast is subordinate to the first and has the role of commending the worship of the first beast. From our earthly perspective this would have been local leaders in cities, towns, and villages that encouraged the population to engage in emperor worship. But, not just encouragement. There was also pressure.

To fail to worship the emperor came to be understood as an act of sedition. So those who would not worship were being forced. If they wouldn't worship they would not receive the marker that allowed them to buy and sell in the market. Christians were coming to ask a hard question: what constitutes compromise? Where is the line between engagement and worship. Out of the various examples Wright gives of this, one clear one is the issue of the Roman coin. They were stamped with Caesar's image and the words, "son of the god," written on it. Was it alright to use this money?

Today, we too have to discern what is appropriate engagement with the culture. As well as what is inappropriate engagement? How do we remain in the world without being of the world? These are hard questions. Lent can be a part of our discernment process. This can be a time and space to step back and take stock of how we engage and if it fits or not.

Prayer

Lord make us strong and unafraid. Help us to discern how to participate with our neighbours while still reflecting you back to the culture rather than the culture back to itself. Amen.

P.S. The number of the beast, 666, stands for Nero Caesar. One less three times the perfect number of Christ, 777.