This bronze coin showing Sol, the sun god, was minted in small quantities between 313 and 326 AD by Saint Constantine (307-337AD), the Great—the Roman Emperor known as the “Thirteenth Apostle” in the East. A small quantity of these unique Roman bronze coins survived the passage of 17 centuries.

It was common for ancient religious beliefs to evolve and merge over time among interconnected cultures. Unlike many ancient religions based on solar worship, the Roman solar cult of Sol Invictus (Latin: the unconquered sun god) was characterized by the core belief in a single, supreme god and his representative, Sol. This cult was a key factor in the rapid rise of Christianity in the late Roman Empire. The origins of the cult in the late 1st century BCE can be traced to the appeal of Mithraism among the military—the result of Roman army's exposure to Persian culture during campaigns in the East. Mithra was a Christ-like, solar deity who was the sole representative of a single, all-powerful God—a new idea for the Romans.

The early Romans initially adopted the earlier Greek Hellenistic religion that incorporated the worship of many deities, including Apollo and Helios—the sun god, who was known to the Romans as Sol. As time passed, Sol eventually took on the combined attributes of Apollo, Helios and Mithra. The early Roman Emperors promoted the rising cult of Sol Invictus with the addition of numerous new temples, statues, rites and festivals created in Sol's name. Like earlier solar deities, Sol's tasks included steering the sun-chariot across the sky each day, a reminder that this cult was a blending of monotheism and earlier paganism.

By promoting the cult and the consolidation of divine power into Sol, Roman emperors were able to please the military and also enhance their own power by identifying Sol as the source of imperial legitimacy; in some cases the emperors were able to promote themselves as the personification of Sol on earth. The "ratiate" crown worn by many emperors on their coins' portraits during the 3rd century AD is thought by some historians as alluding to the evolving solar connection to the emperor’s power.

Constantine in the early 4th century advanced the pagan cult of Sol Invictus to the height of its popularity. Among his efforts was the minting of this special coin dedicated to Sol. Constantine also built his famous Arch in Rome, inscribed with several references to Sol Invictus, and positioned it carefully to align with the colossal 100' bronze statue of Sol that adjoined the Coliseum at the time. The rising popularity Christianity in Rome's rural areas was a factor in Constantine’s later adoption of Christianity as the Empire's official religion—a transition arguably made easier by the preceding, well accepted ideas embodied in and popularized by the cult of Sol Invictus.

This is a bronze follis minted by Constantine I, The Great. The reverse shows Sol, the sun god, wearing a radiate crown—symbol of victory, and holding a globe—symbol of world rule. The inscription reads SOLI INVICTO COMITI (In honor of the unconquered sun god, the companion of the emperor). The emperor's bust, name and titles appear on the obverse. Solar worship dominated many ancient cultures including Imperial Rome for a period. Many ancient customs and rituals of sun worship survived in later Christian festivals and local traditions; among the more notable: the nimbus or halo that is often surrounding the head of Christ in images is remarkably similar to images of ancient solar cult deities. Festivals at Christmas and Easter are similarly associated with ancient solar rituals at the solstice and equinox. There are many other examples.

**DATA:**
- Weight: 2.5-3.5 grams; Diameter: 19.5-21 mm
- Order code: CONSTGRTSOLALB
- Album open measures: 10 13/16" x 7 6/16"
- Album folded measures: 5 6/16" x 7 6/16"

Coin type and grade may vary somewhat from image.