

Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Scripture Readings

First Reading: Isaiah 45:1, 4-6

Thus says the Lord to his anointed, Cyrus, whose right hand I grasp, subduing nations before him, and making kings run in his service, opening doors before him and leaving the gates unbarred: For the sake of Jacob, my servant, of Israel, my chosen one, I have called you by your name, giving you a title, though you knew me not. I am the Lord and there is no other, there is no God besides me. It is I who arm you, though you know me not, so that toward the rising and the setting of the sun people may know that there is none besides me. I am the Lord, there is no other.

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: grace to you and peace. We give thanks to God always for all of you, remembering you in our prayers, unceasingly calling to mind your work of faith and labor of love and endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father, knowing, brothers and sisters loved by God, how you were chosen. For our gospel did not come to you in word alone, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with much conviction.

Gospel: Matthew 22:15-21

The Pharisees went off and plotted how they might entrap Jesus in speech. They sent their disciples to him, with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are a truthful man and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. And you are not concerned with anyone's opinion, for you do not regard a person's status. Tell us, then, what is your opinion: Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?" Knowing their malice, Jesus said, "Why are you testing me, you hypocrites? Show me the coin that pays the census tax." Then they handed him the Roman coin. He said to them, "Whose image is this and whose inscription?" They replied, "Caesar's." At that he said to them, "Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."

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Psalm 96

Give the Lord glory and honor.

Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all you lands. Tell his glory among the nations; among all peoples, his wondrous deeds.

For great is the Lord and highly to be praised; awesome is he, beyond all gods. For all the gods of the nations are things of naught, but the Lord made the heavens.

Give to the Lord, you families of nations, give to the Lord glory and praise; give to the Lord the glory due his name! Bring gifts, and enter his courts.

Worship the Lord, in holy attire. Tremble before him, all the earth; say among the nations: The Lord is king, he governs the peoples with equity.

Give the Lord glory and honor.

Opening Prayer for Mass: Almighty ever-living God, grant that we may always conform our will to yours and serve your majesty in sincerity of heart. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Breaking Open the Word

We believe that the Word of God is living and effective. That means when we read or listen to Scripture, it is Jesus who speaks to us now, in the present moment of our lives. His Living Word gives us hope, purpose and direction in our lives. As we break open these readings for this Sunday, reflect on these questions:

What is Jesus saying to me personally that will give purpose and encouragement to me now?

Am I open to the way Jesus' words are living and effective in the people and world around me?

How will I respond to his message contained in these living words today?

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What Does It All Mean?

*These words of reflection come from **The Word of the Lord: Reflections on the Sunday Readings, Cycle A** by Philip J. McBrien, Twenty-Third Publications, 1995*

First Reading: Isaiah 45:1, 4-6

During a seventy-year exile in Babylon, in the sixth century before Jesus, the people of Abraham and David gave shape to their Scriptures, their liturgical life, their Jewishness. Toward the end of that century, Cyrus the Persian gained power sufficient to topple the Babylonian empire. More important, he permitted the Jews to return to their homeland. For the anonymous poet whose work is inserted into the book of Isaiah, Cyrus is a hero. God has seized Cyrus' right hand, to open gates for the sake of God's chosen people. Although he does not know God, Cyrus is God's instrument who liberates the Jews so that, ultimately, all the world may know God.

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5

These verses are probably the earliest writing in the New Testament. Their tone is upbeat, overflowing with praise for the Thessalonica church's witness of the gospel. Writing on behalf of companions Silvanus and Timothy, Paul offers grace and peace to the audience. He is grateful for their faith, for their charitable work, for their constancy in hope. Most important, he notes their complete conviction, which finds expression in more than mere words. In this earliest written reference to the term "gospel", we find an important clue to all of Paul's thought. The gospel is both word and deed, a word that demands action. Anyone who mouths the words of the gospel without also enacting it distorts it beyond recognition. That is why Paul is so enthusiastic in his praise for the church at Thessalonica. The gospel is not mere words for them, but power. He reminds them, and us, of the very high standard to which Christians aspire.

Gospel: Matthew 22:15-21

The confrontation in Jerusalem continues. Having shamed and embarrassed officials with a series of challenging parables, here Jesus faces disciples of Pharisees, and Herodian sympathizers. They have plotted to trap him in speech, and they ask him, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor or not?" It is a clever question. To answer in the affirmative is to pledge allegiance to a foreign king with divine pretensions. No self-respecting Jewish teacher could do such a thing. To answer "No" is to take a public stance guaranteed to bring the weight of the occupying Roman empire on his head. But Jesus sees through their trap and asks them whose likeness appears on the coins of commerce and taxation. They identify Caesar's coin, and he teaches, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what belongs to God." And where is God's likeness? This episode only implies an answer, but we know it, as do those who have confronted Jesus. God's imprint is upon every human face.

We are the image of God. We must give to God what is God's. We must give to God everything that matters in ourselves. This story condones neither civil disobedience nor complete acquiescence to the requirements of the state. It is about neither. Instead, it forces us to look deep within ourselves and ask what we really do give to God. Jesus escapes the trap set for him by insisting that we must direct our entire selves to the Creator whose likeness we bear.

Closing Reflection and Prayer are taken from Ascend: Companion to the Sunday Readings, Cycle A Life Teen Publications, 2019

In God We Trust

Ask a child to plug in a lamp and they know where to go and what to do. Ask that child where the power comes from and most will point to the socket as the source of the power. Few kids, however would be able to explain to you the true source—be it a power plant or renewable energy—where the power *actually* comes from. They know the destination far better than its source.

The same can be said of the earthly rulers mentioned in this week's readings. In the first reading we hear about Cyrus, the king of Persia, who was given his station and allowed his earthly authority by God "though (Cyrus) knew him (God) not." Similarly, in the Gospel, as the Pharisees set out to upset Christ they posit the question to him about the authority of God versus the authority of Caesar, representing the Roman rule and oppression they found themselves under. Again, here, we see that while Rome might have earthly rule, eternal dominion and authority reside solely within God. We see the distinction being drawn between worldly power and true power, the power that comes in the Holy Spirit (as we are told in the second reading), that which is available to us and which convicts us.

While those in leadership, be it global or local, may not recognize that their power is entrusted to them by others or from above, we who are called to lead in the faith know to "give the Lord glory and honor" as the psalm says, because the only power we enjoy is that which he grants us in his mercy. We know the source of all power and light...while some others only see the socket.

God, thank you for knowing more about what I need than I know myself. Teach me how to lean more on you than I do myself and others. May I trust that you have my best intentions in mind at all times and that you know how to care of me. May I never fear you. May I always truly believe that you can be trusted. Amen.