

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

[Reading I: Isaiah 45:1, 4-6](#)

[Responsorial Psalm: 96:1, 3, 4-5, 7-8, 9-10](#)

[Reading II: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5b](#)

[Gospel: Matthew 22:15-21](#)

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/101820.cfm#main-content>



The first reading comes from when the Jewish people were in captivity in Babylon. Cyrus, the king of Persia, is attacking Babylon, the land today called Iran. Cyrus is called God's anointed, which in Hebrew is "messiah." Isaiah is interpreting civil events from a religious perspective. With the Persians advancing and Babylon falling, God is freeing his people from captivity as prisoners of war. God will be faithful to the covenant with Israel and restore them to their land. Even though Cyrus does not know God, God has called him and uses him to achieve His plan.

Isaiah's message is that all authority comes from God. Those who exercise authority do so at God's pleasure. Isaiah interprets Cyrus's victories over Babylon as God helping him.

"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:"

One cannot generalize from this one example to imply that all military victories are the work of God. Just because an army wins does not mean God is on their side. This becomes clear in our era with Nazism, Communism, and the many dictators who have oppressed the people under their rule.

This theme sets the background for the gospel passage in showing that everything belongs to God. Our selection is the first of four debates with the opponents of Jesus. Today, the Pharisees and the Herodians try to embarrass Jesus. The cooperation between these two groups is a strange mix. The Pharisees sought to distance themselves from those who had contact with the Gentiles. The Herodians, to have power, were willing to cooperate with the Romans, even supporting the collection of Roman taxes. The Herodians were very disliked by most of the Jewish community. If you see these two groups coming together, you know that trouble is coming. They begin with exuberant praise. If they believed what they said, they would pay attention to the teachings of Jesus. Instead, they are trying to trap him.

The denarius was a Roman coin with the image of Tiberius Caesar on it. The inscription on the coin read, "Tiberius Caesar, Augustus, son of the divine Augustus, high priest." Having an image of a human violated the commandment not to make any graven images. The inscription attributes divinity to Augustus Caesar, another violation of the commandment. This is also the background for why money changers were at the Temple. It would be sacrilegious to carry an image into God's presence. It also points out why the Pharisees needed the Herodians to be there. They carried the Roman coins that Pharisees did not.

They intend to trap Jesus with the question, "Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?" If Jesus says yes, the ordinary Jewish people will turn against him, for he would promote cooperation with the hated occupiers. If he says no, he can be accused of treason against the Romans for refusing to follow the law. They are looking to make Jesus look bad one way or another.

Jesus responds with his question and charges them to give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. There are two meanings implied. One, it is his money, so do not have anything to do with it. On the other hand, it could imply paying the taxes. So, Jesus says, make up your minds so neither side can report him to the authorities.

Jesus also adds, "and to God the things that are God's." Since God created everything, everything belongs to God. They are challenged to look at everything differently. God has given us all things, and we are to serve God with them.

Our second reading presents a new letter from Paul to the Thessalonians. It is the earliest piece of writing preserved in the New Testament from 50 or 51 AD. Along with his companions, Paul greets the Christians in Thessalonica and thanks them for responding to God. The city is in northern Greece on the Aegean Sea and was on the trade route between Byzantium in Turkey and Greece.

When Paul preached in the synagogue at Thessalonica, people responded to the Gospel message. They began to live in a new way, showing virtues in their lives." calling to mind your work of faith and labor of love, and endurance in hope." This was not the way of the Greco-Roman society. They began living in a new way. Unlike other philosophical movements or religious cults, something changed, and they recognized the fruit of the Gospel message.

Themes:

Created in the image and Likeness of God
God's call to each person

True God vs false gods
Virtues of Faith, Hope, and Love

Reflection Questions

What are the challenges in remembering that everything belongs to God?

In what ways have you given God what belongs to God, and how have you failed to do so?

What are your responsibilities for participating in civil society? How do you serve God there?

What are some of the false gods that are glorified in contemporary society?

If Paul were to write to you, what qualities would he give thanks for in your life?

Prayer Suggestions

For the Church: that we may manifest each day the work of faith, the labor of love, and the endurance of hope that is ours as God's people

For growth in our commitment to God: that we may know God as the one and only Lord in our lives and fully dedicate ourselves to following God's invitations

For all God's people: that formed in the image and likeness of God, we will manifest God's presence in our workplaces, our families, and our society

For Wisdom: that God will guide us in being faithful citizens without compromising our discipleship and service to God

For the conversion of our hearts: that the false gods of power, prestige, pleasure, and security may be dethroned so that the God of mercy, compassion, forgiveness, and justice may receive our service