



29th Sunday of Ordinary Time

In the first reading (Is 45:1, 4-6) the Lord addresses Cyrus through the prophet Isaiah telling him that He had anointed him for the sake of Israel, giving him a title, subduing nations and kings before him and leaving gates unbarred. To the king who has many gods, He says, "I am the LORD and there is no other, there is no God besides me." Although Cyrus did not know him, the Lord armed him so that from East to West people will know that there is no God but Him.

Something to Think About:

1. Through a prophecy given to Isaiah God is attempting to encourage the Jews that were taken into the Babylonian exile by explaining to them that their fortunes were about to change. God was about to use Cyrus II (also known as Cyrus the Great) to save his people and return them to their homeland. Cyrus would conquer kingdoms from the Greek Aegean Sea to the Indian frontiers, including the kingdom of Babylon in 539 BC. He ruled through a policy known as "pax orientalis" by which he respected the indigenous people's religion and culture. For the Israelites this meant not only were they free to return to their homeland to re-establish their political and religious state, but he also sent skilled laborers and materials to help with the reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem. It was thus that the one true God worked through a worshiper of an alien god to bring about His purposes. Even today God's purposes will not be thwarted. He is able to use all His creation to bring about His wishes.

2. We have a tendency to think that any good person would think and act as we do. Therefore it would have been difficult for the Jewish people to believe that God could use a non-believer to free them. Similarly it is difficult for us to understand that God can continue to work our own salvation through people who do not believe as we do, but He continues to do so. Even in the pandemic we are currently experiencing, He is working out His purposes; believe it or not.

In the second reading (1 Thes 1:1-5b) Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy address the church in Thessalonica in God, the Father, and in Jesus Christ, asking God to give them grace and peace. They always remember the Thessalonians in prayer for their work of faith and labor of love and enduring hope, knowing full well how they were chosen by God. The gospel did not come to them in word only but in the power of the Holy Spirit and with conviction.

Something to Think About:

1. For the last five weeks of this Church calendar year we will be reading from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. There is general agreement that this letter was actually composed written by Paul around 51 AD while he was living in Corinth, making it the oldest document in the New Testament. Thessalonica was a Greek city, named after Alexander's sister. It had a strategic seaport that caused it to be a main path between the East and West parts of the Roman empire. According to Acts 17 there was a group of Jews that lived there that had their own synagogue. Paul was not able to spend much time there to set up a Church because some disgruntled Jews brought him before the Roman authorities and accused him of treason for promoting Jesus as king. As a result he was forced to flee. In this letter he wants to reassure them and to calm the fears by some of them that they would not share in the resurrection of Jesus if they died before His second coming.

2. It is of interest to note that although Paul had been with the Thessalonians only a short time, he presumes in his letter that they were familiar with the Trinity and the theological virtues of faith, hope and love. These were obviously essential truths that were part of the kerygma of the early church from the very start along with what Christ had done for us through His death and resurrection.

In the gospel (Mt 22: 15-21) the Pharisees leave Jesus and begin to plot how they might trap Jesus in His speech. They sent their disciples, along with the Herodians, to trap Jesus saying that they knew that Jesus was a truthful man who He teaches the way of God and that He was not concerned with anyone's opinion. They then ask Jesus opinion whether or not it is lawful to pay tax to Caesar? Jesus asked them why they were testing Him? He asks them to show Him the coin that is used to pay the census tax. They handed Him a Roman coin. Jesus asked whose image and inscription is on it? They replied "Caesar's." He said then repay to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.

Something to Think About:

1. After listening to Jesus' parables the Jewish leadership was more determined than ever to do away with Him. The Pharisees did not like the fact that the people were turning to Jesus for leadership and they did not care for His preaching. The Herodians were afraid that Jesus would cause a disturbance and that they would lose even more power. Already one of Herod the Great's Son, Archelaus, had been removed by Rome for incompetence and they were afraid that the Jews might lose all political influence if Jesus was to cause an uprising. The Pharisees disagreed with paying any tax to Rome while the Herodians wanted to maintain the status quo and supported the tax. Each group sent young disciples to Jesus, hoping that He would not recognize their common desire to entrap Him. In 6 AD the Sanhedrin, made up of mainly Sadducees, was made responsible for collecting three types of tax: 1) a produce tax of one tenth of all the grain and one fifth of all the fruit, 2) a census poll tax of one day's wages for every person between the age of 14 and 65 (this was the reason for the census), and 3) a customs tax at the ports and gates of cities for the transport of goods amounting between 2 and 5% of the value of the goods. The Jewish people hated paying the taxes because they supported their oppressors and their heathen temples. In addition, the system allowed tax collectors to pay a flat fee for a given area and to keep whatever they collected beyond the required tax for themselves. Anyone avoiding the tax was faced with a harsh penalty. The Pharisees and Herodians wanted to place Jesus in a dilemma: if Jesus said it was right to pay the taxes, He would lose the crowds and if He has it was not right to pay them they would hand Jesus over to Herod on the charge of rebellion.

2. The delegates begin by flattening Jesus but He is not deceived. He immediately asks them why they are trying to trap Him in order to expose their hypocrisy

to the crowd. Then He asked them to produce a coin used to pay the tax. It was a denarius that had a graven image of Caesar along with an inscription declaring him to be divine and a chief priest. Jesus then tells them to repay to Caesar the things that are Caesar's: i.e. return the coin with Caesar's image to Caesar. In other words Jesus was saying that citizens ought to acknowledge the authority of the government and pay for the benefits provided by the government. Then Jesus continued that they should repay unto God the things that were God's: i.e. their souls. Jesus was explaining that they needed to love God with their whole mind, heart and soul and that paying taxes was not necessarily incompatible with such a duty. This principle applies to us as well. This means that we need to choose our battles well. We need to cooperate with the state in so far as our faith will allow. We need to seek to balance the radicals on the left and the reactionaries on the right. To make a proper decision requires prayer and discernment, especially at this time of year when we are asked to vote.

Deacon Mike McKale