

TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

October 22, 2017 A

Opening prayer: Lord of the Universe, we gather in your name to share your Word. Open us that we might believe in you more fully. Mold us that we might place our hope in you even in difficult times. Melt our hearts that we might love all that you have created. In the name of Jesus who has redeemed us, we pray. Amen.

Sharing life: How did you experience God's presence or action in your life this past week?

Facilitator reads focus statement: The first and third readings tell us that God is the King of the universe and that our first allegiance belongs to him. In the second reading, Paul sees the Spirit is active within the community as a result of his preaching.

If you have not read the commentary prior to the meeting, consider doing so either before or after each reading.

FIRST READING: Isaiah 45:1, 4-6

God addresses the king in a formal statement, like a royal decree, empowering him to undertake some tasks. What makes this decree extraordinary is that it is addressed to a pagan king, Cyrus, who is unknowingly anointed by God to defeat the enemies of Israel and return the exiles to their homeland.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 96

This psalm celebrates God as the King of Israel.

SECOND READING: 1Thessalonians 1:1-5

For the next five weeks, the second reading will be from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. The tone of the book is warm, tender and positive. Paul obviously has great affection for this particular Christian community. In these opening verses, Paul warmly thanks God for the way the Thessalonians are growing in faith, hope and charity. He reminds them that their conversion is due to the power of the Holy Spirit working through him.

GOSPEL: Matthew 22:15-21

In this "entrapment story," the Pharisees seek to trap Jesus in his teachings. They ask him, "Is it lawful to pay tax to the emperor or not?" The question is put to Jesus to see whether he would declare himself on the side of those who oppose paying taxes to the Romans (the Pharisees), or on the side of those who collaborate with the Romans (the Herodians). If Jesus conceded to the payment of taxes to Caesar, he would lose the esteem of ordinary Jews who very much resent the payment of taxes to the Romans. On the other hand, if he

opposed it, he could be accused of instigating rebellion against the Romans. Jesus' response, "*Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God,*" suggests that one can indeed be loyal both to a religious tradition and to a secular power. It may be difficult at times, especially when their claims conflict, but it is possible.

As God has dominion over the whole of creation, Caesar's relative power is subservient to the ultimate power of God. All authority and power have to be evaluated in the light of God's plan. It is for the people to decide whether in demanding tribute Caesar is reflecting the things of God.

Patricia Sanchez writes: "*Everywhere we go we belong to God for we bear his imprint. We belong to God, not just in church but in our homes, our work places and in the voting booth and we must bring God's values to all of these places.*"

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse, idea or image in the readings spoke to you most? Why?
2. In the time of Isaiah, God used Cyrus, a pagan king, to achieve his purposes. Can you name a recent or current ruler, who is not religious and yet God has used or is using to achieve his purpose?
3. In the second reading, Paul reminds the Thessalonians that it is the power of the Holy Spirit working through Paul that brought their conversion. How have you experienced the Holy Spirit at work in you recently?

4. How can our allegiance to Caesar (meaning country or political party) and our Catholic faith cause some inner conflicts in us, especially in the voting booth?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on today's readings.
Suggestion: Reflect and act on the truth that God is Lord of *every area* of your life.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Especially pray for government leaders, that they seek to bring and protect God's values in their place of work and in their discussion of issues. ©

Save the Date!!

Saturday, March 10, 2018

Annual Day of Reflection

by the Space Coast Alliance of Small Christian Communities with

Father Dave Pivonka, TOR,
The Wild Goose Is Loose!