

TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

October 18, 2020 A

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

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.*

Response to last week's Word: Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator reads focus statement: The first reading and the Gospel speaks of the Lordship of God over human powers.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the first reading, the psalm, and the second reading, pausing briefly after each one.

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 unknowingly is 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.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Matt. 22:15-21

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: Matthew 22:15-21

Today's Gospel is the first of four clashes (often called 'entrapment' stories) between Jesus and various representatives of Judaism. In today's Gospel or entrapment story, the Pharisees and the Herodians ask Jesus, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor or not?" The question is put to Jesus to see whether he would declare himself on the side of the Pharisees who oppose paying taxes to the Romans, or on the side of the Herodians who collaborate with the Romans. 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, aware of the malicious intent of the Pharisees and the Herodians to trick him, and knowing full well that they are not really interested in God or in taxes, asks for a coin: "Show me the coin that pays the census tax." The fact that there is such a coin shows that they have accepted Roman rule, revealing their hypocrisy. Jesus duly declares that if the coin has Caesar's image on it, then it belongs to Caesar and they should give it to Caesar.

But Jesus adds something they did not expect. While they (and we) are obliged to pay taxes, Jesus tells them (and us) that they (and we) are to “give to God what belongs to God.” In essence, Jesus is telling them (and us) that there is a kingdom much greater and more important than Caesar’s. Since God made all things (which bear his image), everything belongs to 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.”

(Used with permission *The Word We Celebrate: Commentary on the Sunday lectionary Years A, B, C*, by Patricia Sanchez, Sheed & Ward publisher (9-1-89).)

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what verse or image in the readings caught your attention or drew you in. Was there a verse or aspect of the readings that challenged you?

The facilitator can decide which is more helpful: to share the next questions with the whole group, or to share in smaller groups of three or four.

2. In the first reading, Cyrus was unaware that he was carrying out God’s will when he made it possible for the Jews to return to their homeland. Can you think of a leader or someone else who is not a believer but is unknowingly carrying out God’s will?

3. When you vote in the upcoming election, what issues take center stage for you? How does your Catholic faith inform your vote? (No need to get into a political debate. Just share the issues that are important to you and why.)

4. When it comes to political and some religious issues, our country is very divided. What if anything can be done to bring us together for the sake of the common good?

5. Name one thing today’s Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

RESPONDING TO GOD’S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week’s readings. Suggestion: As you prepare to vote this November, prayerfully look on all the issues and not just one issue.

JOURNALING. *Having listened to God’s Word and listened to others reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Loving and caring God, we bear your imprint. Help me to remember this as I go about my daily work and as I vote this November.*

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? For what or for whom do we need to pray?

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

Prayer Before An Election

Lord God, as the election approaches, we seek to better understand the issues and concerns that confront our city/state/country, and how the Gospel compels us to respond as faithful citizens in our community.

We ask for eyes that are free from blindness so that we might see each other as brothers and sisters, one and equal in dignity, especially those who are victims of abuse and violence, deceit and poverty.

We ask for ears that will hear the cries of children, unborn and those abandoned, men and women oppressed because of race or creed, religion or gender.

We ask for minds and hearts that are open to hearing the voice of leaders who will bring us closer to your Kingdom.

We pray for discernment so that we may choose leaders who hear your Word, live your love, and keep in the ways of your truth as they follow in the steps of Jesus and his Apostles and guide us to your Kingdom of justice and peace.

We ask this in the name of your Son Jesus Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

-Author Unknown