

Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time – October 22, 2017 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture 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.

Psalm: Ps 96:1, 3, 4-5, 7-8, 9-10

R. (7b) 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.

R. Give the Lord glory and honor.

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 nought,
but the LORD made the heavens.

R. Give the Lord glory and honor.

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.

R. Give the Lord glory and honor.

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.

R. Give the Lord glory and honor.

Scripture Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5b

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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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

There seem to be two realms, God's and Caesar's. Jesus says so in Sunday's Gospel. "Give to God the things that are God's and to Caesar the things that are Caesar's." But can't we live in both worlds? We want to, don't we? Jesus made his statement to settle an argument posed to him by the Pharisees. But if you push his statement too far, everything of Caesar must go away because it is not God, or on the other hand, God has to go away because science and secularism are so powerful. Which realm do you live in? Are you a "Sunday Catholic," giving to God maybe an hour per week at Mass (if that!) and then getting on with life: television and cars and food and work, etc.? And maybe being afraid? Or wishing things had turned out better? Have you given your life to Caesar? Or do you try it the other way around? Perhaps you are so serious about Christianity and spirituality that you try to get away from every worldly thing and to live uncorrupted. Throughout the history of Christianity there have been multitudinous examples: the desert hermits, the cloistered nuns and monks, the great mystics. "A penny for Caesar and all the rest for God"? Can God and Caesar co-exist?

But what if you are created to be a container for God's presence right in the midst of the secular world? What if, in spite of the voices within you saying that you are not worth much, in spite of the setbacks of life, the losses, the flatness, the disappointments, the reversals, what if you were created with room inside you where God, out of love for you, can be quietly present? I hear the objections to such an idea: "God would never be at home in me, not until I do a lot better with my life." Or, "You want me to be some kind of nut, running around acting holy?" Or, "Sure, I want to let God in, but I like beer and TV too much." Or, "What does all this have to do with real life?" Or simply, "I don't want to." Ok. But what if God were a great friend, a loving, faithful amigo who really does want to be with you, within you, as much as is possible? In fact, how would it be if God were a companion who truly and actually accepts you and forgives you completely whenever you need it? It's another way to look at the connection between heaven and earth. God put you and me into the world to sanctify it, to befriend the things of Caesar. To work in the world of sin, with God, in spite of our own sins? Jesus says, give to God "what(ever) belongs to God." "Belongs," not in a possessive way, but in the way felt by those who love and are loved. If this is how it is, why wouldn't we, in return, want to give ourselves to God? And then also to bring our God-touched selves into Caesar's palaces and onto the dirty roads outside them, to show at least some folks what Christ is all about? Which realm should we live in? Both.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. Cyrus, a Gentile, permitted the Israelites to return from captivity in Babylon to their homeland. Who are the people in the last hundred and fifty years who have broken down the walls of prejudice and freed oppressed peoples? Were they all Christian? Do you think God chose them? Has God ever used you? If so, were you aware of it?
2. Paul says, "For our Gospel did not come to you in word alone, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with much conviction." Does the Holy Spirit allow us to enter more into the sense of Christ's words? Does the Spirit give us fraternal dialogue (brotherly conversation which helps us speak with friendship and tenderness) to solve a problem?
3. In this Gospel, are the Pharisees interested more in taxes or in undermining Jesus' influence? Do God's and Caesar's worlds have to be separated? What would the world look like if they were (somewhat) joined together?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

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, for ever and ever. Amen