

## Notes for Next Sunday

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

### The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Isaiah 45:1-7). Infinitely merciful and patient, God does not tire to repeat Himself. Again and again He promises to deliver His fallen creatures and goes to great lengths to persuade doubting and fainthearted souls to believe the proclamation of their liberation. Cyrus, a foreign emperor, is called “his anointed” just as he is called “my shepherd” (44:28), because God has appointed him to carry out a divine commission in his role as king. However, in the case of Cyrus, it seems unlikely that he was literally anointed. As Cyrus freed Israelite captives by defeating Babylon, all the more does the eternal Messiah, Jesus, free his people by his defeat of sin, death, and the devil.

Epistle (1 Thessalonians 3:1-10). The Thessalonians become model Christians in words and deeds due to the impact of the Gospel in their lives and the fruit of the Spirit demonstrated in their faith, love, and hope. Compared to the Thessalonians, we are much poorer in our faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope. Even without hardship or persecution, we are slow to confess our faith and live it out in love. The Lord knows each one of us and our specific situation. His Spirit has created faith in us and gives us power and full conviction. Despite our weaknesses and failings, His unfailing love and forgiveness will sustain us to be His witnesses.

Gospel (Matthew 22:15-22). There is an old saying that politics makes strange bedfellows. Here the Pharisees and the Herodians display a common hatred for Jesus that overshadows their sharp disagreements with each other. Once again, Jesus' adversaries set a trap for Him, by means of a trick question. Jesus does not fall for their trick. He teaches them that Jesus' followers owe loyalty and obedience not only to Him, but also to the human rulers that God Himself has established. Though Christians may be tempted to avoid taxes and shirk civic responsibilities, they must “render to Caesar.”

*for more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.*

OLD TESTAMENT – Isaiah 45:1-7

**“This is what the LORD says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: <sup>2</sup>I will go before you and will level the mountains, I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron. <sup>3</sup>I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the LORD, the God of Israel, who summons you by name. <sup>4</sup>For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me. <sup>5</sup>I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me, <sup>6</sup>so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting men may know there is none besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other. <sup>7</sup>I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things.**

*45:1 loose the belts.* Figurative. A man “girded up” his loins in preparation for battle and donned his weapon (Ps 45:3). The loosening would remove the weapons and make him unprepared to fight. The kings were to be deprived of power. (TLSB)

*45:2 level the mountains.* Means “swollen up places” or “hills.” God promises to go before Cyrus, even as he preceded his covenant people during their wilderness wandering and conquest of Canaan. Note the

parallel to Is 40:3-4, which describes the preparations for the coming of the Lord himself in Jesus Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

*45:3 summons you by name.* This verse concludes with the first of three reasons for God's action. The Lord granted Cyrus victories and success so that he would know that it was the Lord who stood behind him. (PBC)

*45:4 my chosen.* For Israel's comfort, the Lord specifically names Cyrus, who has done nothing to earn his status in the Lord's sight. (TLSB)

*45:5 I ... there is no other.* This Lordship is not just the kingdom of grace over believers, but also God's kingdom of power over unbelievers.

*45:6 that people may know.* God acts to spread the message of salvation throughout the world because He is the only God for all (Mt 28:18–20). (TLSB)

#### EPISTLE – 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

**Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you. <sup>2</sup>We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. <sup>3</sup>We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup>For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, <sup>5</sup>because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. <sup>6</sup>You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. <sup>7</sup>And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. <sup>8</sup>The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, <sup>9</sup>for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, <sup>10</sup>and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.**

*3:1 Thessalonians.* In the first century, Thessalonica was the capital city of the province of Macedonia and the largest city on the Greek Peninsula. (TLSB)

*3:3 work produced by faith.* Faith produces action (see Ro 1:5; 16:26; Gal 5:6; 2Th 1:11; Jas 2:14–26). (CSB)

*3:3 your endurance.* Endurance is not passive acquiescence of life's twists and turns, but firm resolve and quiet strength to meet adversity. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

*3:5 power.* The good news of our Lord Jesus Christ always has power to change lives (Heb 4:12). The Word's power may be demonstrated in visible, supernatural miracles in areas that have not been reached with the Gospel. (TLSB)

*3:6 severe suffering.* Trouble or hardship that Christians may have due to their faith and witness. Some of Paul's hosts in Thessalonica were definitely persecuted by their fellow countrymen (Ac 17:1–9). (TLSB)

*3:9 serve idols.* Before the Gospel came to them, the Gentile Thessalonians worshiped idols. Forsaking idol worship and coming to the true and living God was important evidence of true conversion in the first century. (TLSB)

*3:10 wrath.* Divine judgment to come upon the unbelieving on the Last Day. (TLSB)

GOSPEL – Matthew 22:15-22

<sup>15</sup> Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. <sup>16</sup> They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. “Teacher,” they said, “we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. <sup>17</sup> Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” <sup>18</sup> But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? <sup>19</sup> Show me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought him a denarius, <sup>20</sup> and he asked them, “Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?” <sup>21</sup> “Caesar’s,” they replied. Then he said to them, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” <sup>22</sup> When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

22:15-17 The Pharisees were ardent nationalists, opposed to Roman rule, while they hated Herodians, as their name indicates, supported the Roman rule of the Herods. Now, however, the Pharisees enlisted the help of the Herodians to trap Jesus in his words. (PBC)

22:16 *their disciples*. Just as Jesus had disciples, so also did other famous religious figures, such as John the Baptist (9:14; 11:2) and, in this case, the Pharisees. (TLSB)

22:16 *we know you are a man of integrity*. The Pharisees would not come themselves, but would send a group of their keenest students together with the Herodians, who this time might be expected to come before him without arousing in him a suspicion of sinister motives on their part. The impression which they evidentially designed to make was that a dispute had occurred between them and they now desired to settle it by referring the matter to an authority such as Jesus was. We must always remember that the devil is a liar and the father of lies.

22:17 *Pay taxes to Caesar or not*. This tax was levied directly by Roman authority in Judea and had perhaps been a contributing cause to social unrest and violence a generation before. (CC)

22:19 *denarius*. The common Roman coin of that day. On one side was the portrait of Emperor Tiberius and on the other the inscription in Latin: “Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the divine Augustus.” The coin was issued by Caesar and was used for paying tax to him. (CSB)

22:22 *they left him*. They left him alone and in a sense they had set a trap for Jesus, but had fallen into it themselves.