

THE TWENTY-NINETH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – A

In the gospel reading the Pharisees set a trap for Jesus. Jesus asks why they have set this trap and very easily confounds their malice. In the first reading Isaiah records God's words to Cyrus who is to overthrow the Babylonian empire and allow the Israelites to return home from their exile. In the first reading Paul remembers before God 'how active is the faith, how unsparing the love how persevering the hope which you have from our Lord Jesus Christ' of the Thessalonian community.

The **First Reading** comes from the prophet Isaiah. He was a major prophet in Israel but the book which bears his name is not all his work. The reading today comes from the second part of the book, chs.40-55 (Second Isaiah), which deals with a period of Jewish history 200 years after Isaiah's day when Jerusalem has fallen and the nation is in exile in Babylon. Cyrus, the instrument of God, is about to come and overpower the Babylonian Empire and be the means by which the Israelites are able to return, a new Exodus. Embedded in the book are four passages called the 'Songs of the Servant of Yahweh.' They depict a perfect servant of God who is the light of the nations and gathers in God's people. He is one who preaches the true faith who expiates people's sins by his own death and is glorified by God. This part of the book, in contrast with the first part which is for the most part threatening, is far more consoling as the opening words announce: "Console my people, console them,' says your God."

The reading, 45.1,4-6, is a royal enthronement prophecy. Cyrus is summoned by name and receives the title of 'Yahweh's anointed one' which used to be reserved for the kings of Israel and became the title of the awaited saviour-king. Here the title is conferred on a foreign ruler who does not know Yahweh yet nations will bow before him and all gateways open before him. So why has God called Cyrus to such an exalted position? The reason is given in the following lines of the reading. Cyrus has been called 'for the sake of my servant Israel....I have armed you so that it may be known from east to west that there is no one except me. I am Yahweh and there is no other.' Perhaps once again we have to learn that God's ways are very different from ours.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 95.1,3-5,7-10, is a hymn in honour of the sovereignty of God and of his coming as judge of the world. We have heard in the first reading, 'I am Yahweh and there is no other' the psalm acknowledges God's 'splendour and majesty,' his 'glory and power,' that, 'Yahweh is king....he will judge the nations with justice.' The psalm is a reflection on the first reading.

The **Second Reading** comes from the first letter of St Paul to the Thessalonians. Paul founded the Church in Thessalonica on his 2nd missionary journey in the summer of the year 50. He wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians in the winter of 50/51, some of his earliest writing. In the opening chapters Paul writes very affectionately to his converts now undergoing persecution. In the latter part of the letter he gives some practical suggestions including answers to questions about what happens to people when they die and about Christ's Second Coming (the Parousia). This letter along with the second one are important because they give us Paul's teaching about the end of time and also give us Paul's thinking at this time which was, how did Christ's Resurrection from the dead and his Second Coming bring salvation to his converts whether alive or dead?

The reading, 1.1-5, is the opening of the letter saying from whom the letter comes and wishing the Thessalonians grace and peace. The active faith, the unsparing love and the persevering hope, faith, hope and love, which Paul distinguishes in the letter to the Corinthians as the three enduring virtues of the Christian, are here found at work in the life of the Church. Paul tells the Thessalonians that they 'have been chosen' because the gospel Paul preached to them was not just words 'but also in power in the Holy Spirit and with great effect.' Paul goes on to tell them that they became an example to all believers 'since it was from you that the word of the Lord rang out....and your faith in God spread everywhere.' Read if you have time from v.2-v.10 to give you a fuller picture of the reading.