

Tested

*A Missionary Commentary on the
Sunday Readings*

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 45:1, 4-6
Psalm 96:1+3, 4-5, 7-8, 9-10
1 Thessalonians 1:1-5b
Matthew 22:15-21

[USCCB link to the Sunday Readings](#)

Conflict dominates the headlines. The war in Ukraine continues, war is now being waged by Israel against Hamas, and the House Republicans cannot choose a Speaker of the House.

Bishop Baron will frequently talk about our “ego-drama” and contrast that to God’s “theo-drama.” The “ego-drama” is often cloaked, and expressed, in political theater in our society. In a similar way, there is political theater at play in the gospel today. St. Matthew, following the Gospel of Mark, reveals a plot by the Pharisees to “entrap” Jesus.

Jesus was seen as a bit player in the political theater between the Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians until his popularity grew and the people hailed him “son of David” as he rode into Jerusalem “on a colt.” If the Pharisees could get Jesus to choose them, who opposed the temple tax on religious grounds, or the Herodians who favored it to keep Herod in power, then they could either use him for their purposes or oppose him.

Of course, the ruse does not work. Jesus engages them, addresses their shared reality, clarifies the act, and judges their political theater. First, he speaks to their hearts, their motivation. He recognizes Rome’s occupation of Israel. Paying the tax is not a religious act, it is a political one. Finally, Rome, like Cyrus in Isaiah, is under God’s authority. It is the Pharisees, Herodians, and the Sadducees that must give to God what belongs to God – belief in Jesus as the Son of God, the true and lasting King that redeems all power, both religious and political.

Missioners are also realists. They know that whenever two or three are gathered, there will be conflict. Keeping their eyes focused on Jesus, they proclaim the gospel to the poor, liberty to captives, and a year of favor from the Lord. They befriend rich and poor alike, inviting, supporting, and accompanying both to justice and peace.

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Notes on the Sunday Readings

First Reading

Isaiah prophesizes. Cyrus, the King of Persia, who does not know the Lord, is called by the Lord “for the sake of Jacob” and so people everywhere will know “I am the Lord and there is no other, there is no God besides me.”

Psalm

The psalmist is driven to sing of the “wonderous deeds” of the Lord, who “made the heavens,” and governs “the peoples with equity.”

Second Reading

Saint Paul, after giving thanks for the faith of the Thessalonians, reminds them, and us, that faith is not just “word alone” but also power and conviction “in the Holy Spirit.”

Gospel

The mission of Jesus compelled him to preach the Gospel throughout Galilee and Judea, gathering and forming a community of disciples, of missionaries, along the way to Jerusalem where he is recognized as “coming in the name of the Lord.” He purifies the temple, teaches through parables, and defends the Gospel. Those who cling to their power, resisting the truth of the Gospel, set a trap to force him to align with them; “is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?” Jesus, masterfully, sees through their malice and hypocrisy. “Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.”

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