

# TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Isaiah = i-ZAY-uh

Cyrus = SI-ruhs

A forceful reading whose tone is stern.

Slight pause between “kings” and “run.”

These lines, echoing the first of the Ten Commandments, is the heart of this reading.

The concluding repetition requires emphasis on “is no other.”

## TO KEEP IN MIND

Read the Scripture passage and its commentary in Workbook. Then read it from your Bible, including what comes before and after it, so that you understand the context.

**READING I** Today’s readings illustrate an interesting theme—namely, “How can God work for good in a world that does not believe in God?” This first reading is an example. King Cyrus was a Persian king who reigned in 559–530 bc and who created the largest empire known to date. Part of his success in managing his vast empire was allowing conquered peoples to have some governing powers at the regional level and respecting the religions and customs of his subjects. An edict by King Cyrus in 538 bc allowed the Judean exiles to return from Babylon to Jerusalem,

## LECTIONARY #145

READING I Isaiah 45:1, 4–6

### A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

**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**.

and the author of Second Isaiah says this is God’s doing.

In this first reading, God is speaking through the prophet, and he identifies Cyrus as God’s anointed. The Hebrew word is *mashiach*, meaning “anointed” or “messiah” in English. Kings were anointed, so in some sense this title is not surprising, but the prophet goes on to describe Cyrus as chosen to advance his conquest of other nations on God’s behalf and to demonstrate to the world that there is no god other than the God of Jacob and Israel. Moreover, he says that God called Cyrus by name and

gave him a title—probably referring to his messiahship—even though Cyrus did not know the God of the Israelites. What a stunning declaration! God can work even through people who do not know God or acknowledge God as their savior.

**READING II** Our second reading is the opening section of Paul’s First Letter to the Thessalonians. Here we see the standard letter opening of first-century Hellenistic writers: sender, recipients, greeting, and thanksgiving. Only Paul’s letter to the Galatians deviates from this pat-

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 96:1, 3, 4–5, 7–8, 9–10 (7b)

**R. 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.

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.

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.

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.

READING II 1 Thessalonians 1:1–5b

**A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Thessalonians**

**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.**

Thessalonians = thes-uh-LOH-nee-uhnz

Silvanus = sil-VAY-nuhs

This reading comes from the opening of Paul's first letter to the members of the early church in Thessalonica. In effect, it is the salutation, which is meant to have a rousing, even cheerful quality.

This thanks being given is sincere; let your tone reflect that sincerity.

A rousing and spirited conclusion.

tern, and that is because he was too mad at the Galatian churches and the people who were leading them astray to pray in thanksgiving to God for them. Instead, he gives them a good scolding (see Galatians 1:6–7)! Turning our attention back to today's reading, we see that Timothy, who was Paul's constant companion for much of his ministry, is mentioned here and in several other letters as a co-sender. Likewise, Silvanus is mentioned; he is most likely the one identified as Silas in Acts of the Apostles (e.g., Acts 15:22, 40). Paul's thanksgiving is in

the form of a prayer to God as he remembers the community's exercise of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. Notice that Paul does not view these virtues as abstractions, since he ties them to nouns that suggest activity: work, labor, and endurance, respectively. Finally, he identifies the source and sustainer of this activity—namely, the Holy Spirit. Notice, also, the affection that Paul has for this community. He calls them God's beloved and God's chosen ones.

**GOSPEL**

Today's Gospel reading is found in all three of the synoptic Gospels with slight variations. It is a story about some Pharisees, teachers of the Law, teaming up with some Herodians to entrap Jesus so that they could make a formal complaint against him. The Herodians are often paired with the Pharisees in the synoptic Gospels as groups who were opposed to Roman rule, but the Herodians are so named because they wanted someone from the lineage of Herod the Great to be their ruler. Herod the Great was origi-

Pharisees = FAYR-uh-seez

This reading consists of a set-up that backfires on the Pharisees. Its drama is inherent. No need to overplay it.

Especially, the wickedness of the Pharisees: Don't overplay it. It will come through in your steady proclamation.

Consider that Jesus' tone here is exasperation.

Pause before "Caesar's" to suggest the Pharisees' recognition that their plan to entrap Jesus has backfired.

## GOSPEL Matthew 22:15–21

### A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

#### 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**."

nally from Edom, south of Judea, and was raised as a Jew by his parents.

As the scene unfolds, the Pharisees and Herodians heap (false) praise on Jesus for being impartial and sincere in his efforts to teach the way of God. This is their set-up to ensnare Jesus by flattery, but he recognizes their evil intent. They ask him whether it is lawful for Jews to pay taxes to the emperor. But Jesus calls them out as the hypocrites they are by demanding that they show him the coin used for paying the tax, a Roman denarius, and asking whose image is on the coin and what is written on it. The

image is that of the emperor, and its inscription would read something like "Tiberius Caesar, Augustus, son of divine Augustus." Jews who were strict observers of Jewish law would not admit to being in possession of a denarius, because of their strong belief there is no god except the God of Israel. But someone in the group pulls out the coin, probably with great embarrassment when they realize that Jesus has defeated them in this confrontation. Some interpreters of Jesus' response—"Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God"—suggest that it is an argument for

the separation of church and state. However, in first-century Palestine, no such division existed. Rather, his words more likely reflect the notion that kinship is more important—in this case kinship with God—than polity, what we might call civil entities, though it has a place in society and should be respected as such. Thus, the second half of Jesus' statement is an accusation directed at the Pharisees and Herodians: they do not pay to God the honor that is due to God. C.C.