

# THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

## LECTIONARY #148

READING I Exodus 22:20–26

### A reading from the Book of Exodus

Thus says the LORD:

**“You shall not molest or oppress an alien,  
for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt.**

**You shall not wrong any widow or orphan.**

**If ever you wrong them and they cry out to me,**

**I will surely hear their cry.**

**My wrath will flare up, and I will kill you with the sword;**

**then your own wives will be widows, and your  
children orphans.**

**“If you lend money to one of your poor neighbors among  
my people,**

**you shall not act like an extortioner toward him  
by demanding interest from him.**

**If you take your neighbor’s cloak as a pledge,**

**you shall return it to him before sunset;**

**for this cloak of his is the only covering he has for his body.**

**What else has he to sleep in?**

**If he cries out to me, I will hear him; for I am compassionate.”**

Exodus = EK-suh-duhs

The tone of this powerful reading is unusually stern.

Note the violence of the Lord’s wrath, flaring up. Give slight emphasis to “kill.”

extortioner = ek-STOHR-shuhn-\*r  
Even emphasis on “shall not act.”

The reading concludes with a note of contrast on the word “compassionate.”

### READING I

Our first reading comes from a larger section of Exodus that biblical scholars call the Covenant Code (Exodus 20:22–23:33), which consists of a collection of case law, pronouncements, commands, and prohibitions. The Covenant Code follows immediately after God’s appearance on Mount Sinai and delivery of the Ten Commandments. With the thunder, lightning, and smoke on the mountain, the Israelites became afraid and told Moses to speak God’s commands to them instead of them directly encoun-

tering God. Thus, Moses became the mediator of God’s covenant law to the people.

Today’s reading provides us with two of these commands from the Covenant Code. Both fall into a category that today we might call social justice teaching. The first command is to protect and not abuse the resident alien. The Hebrew word is *ger*, meaning “stranger, temporary dweller, or sojourner.” The reason given for this mandate is that God did the same for them when they were sojourners in the land. In the Old Testament especially, resident

aliens are regularly grouped with widows and orphans as the poorest and most vulnerable in society. The punishment due to those who do not observe this command speaks to its importance.

The second command has to do with money lending, which, in the ancient world, was more like the pawn broker today than our modern banking system. Only poor people who had no other access to financial resources used money lenders, who charged high interest and demanded significant collateral. This command forbids

For meditation and context:

Thessalonians = thes-uh-LOH-nee-uhn

Paul is heaping praise in this reading onto the Thessalonians for how impressively they have become models for believers. His praise is as sincere as it is motivating, which you can convey to your assembly as you proclaim.

Macedonia = mas-eh-DOH-nee-uh  
Achaia = uh-KAY-uh

Slight pause between "declare" and "about."

charging interest, and it places substantial limitations on what constitutes as collateral. For example, you cannot keep a person's cloak as collateral, because it likely serves as his bedding at night. Notice that God calls the poor "my people." How can we deny God's people the protections they need?

**READING II** Today's second reading is the second half of the thanksgiving section of the First Letter to the Thessalonians, which we began reading last week. The thanksgiving sections of

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 18:2-3, 3-4, 47, 51 (2)

**R. I love you, Lord, my strength.**

I love you, O LORD, my strength,  
O LORD, my rock, my fortress,  
my deliverer.

The LORD lives and blessed be my rock!  
Extolled be God my savior.  
You who gave great victories to your king  
and showed kindness to your anointed.

My God, my rock of refuge,  
my shield, the horn of my salvation,  
my stronghold!

Praised be the LORD, I exclaim,  
and I am safe from my enemies.

READING II 1 Thessalonians 1:5c-10

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

**Brothers and sisters:**

You know what sort of people we were among you for your sake.

And you became **imitators** of us and of the **Lord**,  
**receiving the word in great affliction**, with joy from the  
**Holy Spirit**,

so that you became a **model** for all the **believers**  
in **Macedonia** and in **Achaia**.

For **from** you the **word** of the **Lord** has **sounded forth**  
not **only** in **Macedonia** and in **Achaia**,  
but in **every place** your **faith in God** has gone forth,  
so that we have **no need** to say **anything**.

For **they themselves** **openly declare about us**  
**what sort of reception** we had **among** you,  
and how you **turned to God** from **idols**  
to serve the **living and true God**  
and to **await his Son** from **heaven**,  
whom he **raised from the dead**,  
**Jesus**, who **delivers** us from the **coming wrath**.

Paul's letters are interesting because they often contain the major themes of the letter. This one is no exception. One of his favorite themes is captured in the phrase, "And you became imitators of us and of the Lord." It might sound arrogant to modern listeners, but Paul repeatedly tells the communities that he founded to imitate him. He can say this because he sees his own life as imitating Christ, that is, dying with him so that he can come to new life in Christ (see Philippians 3:7-11). All of this is by God's grace.

A related theme that Paul previews in this thanksgiving is the affliction that they share. The Greek word for this is *thlipsis*, and it means "oppression, affliction, tribulation, or distress." Paul intends it to refer to the tribulations that were expected to accompany the parousia, the return of the risen Christ in the end time. Although he was mistaken about the timing of the parousia—he thought it would be in his lifetime (1 Thessalonians 4:14-18)—his message is sound. Despite afflictions, Christians should receive God's word with joy and live out their faith in service, so that they can be an

## GOSPEL Matthew 22:34–40

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

When the **Pharisees** heard that **Jesus** had **silenced** the **Sadducees**, they **gathered together**, and **one** of them, a **scholar of the law**, **tested** him by **asking**,  
**“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?”**

He **said** to him,  
**“You shall love the Lord, your God,**  
 with all your **heart**,  
 with all your **soul**,  
 and with all your **mind**.

**This is the greatest and the first commandment.**

The **second** is like it:

You shall love your **neighbor as yourself**.  
 The **whole law** and the **prophets depend on these two commandments.**”

Pharisees = FAYH-uh-seez

Sadducees = SAD-yoo-seez

The greatest commandment; this reading is as consequential to Christian belief as it is powerful and concise. Its clarity is that of water from the clearest spring.

Slight pause between “prophets” and “depend.”

The emphases on the words in this line are worth practicing to get right.

example to others until the coming of the risen Lord. Moreover, we can live in hope because, just as God raised Jesus, Jesus will rescue us at the end time.

## GOSPEL

Our Gospel reading picks up the subject of the Covenant Code in today’s first reading. In the preceding verses, the Sadducees challenged Jesus with an issue related to teachings about resurrection of the dead, but Jesus bested them with his response (Matthew 22:23–33). The Sadducees were theologically conservative and did not

accept the possibility of resurrection. They were also part of the leadership in Jerusalem and Judea, though they were not well liked by the Jewish population because they coluded with the Romans to maintain their positions of power.

Knowing that the Sadducees failed in trying to bring Jesus down, now the Pharisees, who were scholars and interpreters of Jewish Law, try to challenge Jesus. Their designated speaker, a lawyer (Greek, *nomikos*, meaning someone who was an expert in the law) asks this question: “Teacher, which commandment in the

law is the greatest?” In essence, they are testing Jesus on what he thinks makes all of Jewish law meaningful and relevant. This is a monumental question fraught with potential landmines, but Jesus answers beautifully, quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. To love God with all your heart, soul, and mind describes fidelity to God and to the covenant that God made with his people. To love your neighbor as you might love yourself is to abandon any tendency toward narcissism and to be focused on others in all we say and do. C.C.