



### OPENING PRAYER

Leader: *The LORD is king, he governs all His people with equity.*

All: **Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all you lands. Tell His glory among the nations; among all peoples, tell of his wondrous deeds.**

Leader: *For the LORD is great and should be highly praised; awesome is He, above all gods.*

All: **For all the gods of the nations are things of naught, but the LORD made the heavens.**

Leader: *Let us invoke the presence of God:*

**Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth.**

**O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit have instructed the hearts of the faithful grant that by the same Spirit we may truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations.**

**Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.**

### First Reading Comments [Isaiah 45 (1), (4-6)]

***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.***

### Commentaries

Cyrus, king of the Persians, built a great empire. By the year 538 BC he conquered Babylon, the reigning empire of that time. After defeating this nation, the Persian king allowed the Israelites to return to their land after they had been exiled in Babylon for more than 50 years. In this way, Cyrus is seen as the protagonist of another chapter in *the History of Salvation*. In the book of Isaiah, he is an instrument of God in favor of His people and it is impressive that the author calls Cyrus, a pagan, "anointed" by God. This is the only case in the Hebrew Bible (that's our Old Testament) in which a non-Israelite receives such an honor, usually reserved for the kings, priests and prophets of Israel.

Cyrus's military, political, and economic successes are interpreted as the Lord's plan because God has chosen and helped him be an instrument of liberation of God's people, the one God who is the Lord of the world and history. The author is not limited to just narrating a historical fact but he also introduces theology into his writing to reaffirm that there is only one God, and that nothing is beyond his control. God always acts in history - although sometimes in different forms - to guide his people and all of humanity toward the goodness He has planned for all.



### Reflection

- (1) Read Ezra 1 (1-8). Comment on how it relates to this passage.
- (2) Now read 2 Chronicles 36 (22-23). What struck you from this text? How does it relate to question 2?
- (3) Did you know Cyrus, who was a Gentile, was used by God to help His Chosen People? What lessons can you gain from this?
- (4) Give examples of other non-Christians that have been used by God to spread the good.
- (5) Do you remember any occasion in which hope arose from where it was least expected?

## Second Reading [Thessalonians 1 (1-5)]

**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.**

## Commentaries

We are entering into the "final lap" of the liturgical year (only 7 remaining Sundays until the Solemnity of Christ the King). Every year around this time, the Church offers us texts with contents related to the end of times ("eschatological"). The letter Paul wrote to the Christians of Thessalonica is believed to be the first written document of the New Testament, written by the year 51, which was several years earlier than the Gospels. In this letter, the Apostle discusses with Christians the second coming of the Lord (parousia). But the passage that we study this week contains only the initial greeting and other preliminary ideas. In the coming weeks we will go more into the eschatological theme.

As in all the letters of Paul, the initial greeting contains a desire of grace and peace for the community. Immediately, the letter continues with a prayer of thanksgiving to God the Father. The reason for the gratitude is the way in which the Thessalonians have accepted Christ's message, which is expressed by the way they live the virtues of faith, hope, and love. Each of the three virtues is described clearly: faith is active, love is a constant effort, demanding and difficult, and hope brings endurance and constancy.

Another idea that Paul shows in most of his writings is God's choice of His People. Christians are beloved of God: it is a phrase that the Apostle uses to express the true Christian identity. One of the signs of God's love is seen by the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

## Reflection

- (1) Do you know of someone who has had a life "before Christ and after Christ"? Someone who came to know Christ and have a relationship with Him after he or she lived for a while?
- (2) It is said that a person whose life has been changed by knowing Christ has difficulty overcoming a kind of "nostalgia" for the previous lifestyle. Do you agree with this? What should be done?
- (3) How would you give encouragement and support to those who have taken the step to change their life for the sake of the Gospel?
- (4) Compare and contrast the following two ideas: "to receive the Word as a lifestyle", "to receive the Word as a code of conduct." Which way do you think the Thessalonians received the Word?

## Gospel [Matthew 22 (15-21)]

**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."**

## Commentaries

The famous dispute about the tribute to Cesar happens within the last weeks of Jesus when he's already in Jerusalem. The evangelist emphasizes the aggressive attitude of the enemies of the Messiah who are looking for an excuse to accuse him and take him prisoner. The question is presented in a very clever way because with any response, Jesus will give them evidence of a crime that they want him to commit. Before Jesus came, people within the community did not have good relationships: the Pharisees were opponents of the Romans while the Herodians were allies of the Romans. An affirmative answer would give to the Pharisees reason to accuse him of blasphemy before the Sanhedrin because he showed allegiance to the power (and currency) of Rome, something that could only be given to God. On the other hand, a negative response would allow the Herodians to accuse Jesus of rebelling against the authorities.

Jesus responds with questions and asks for a coin. It is assumed that a good Israelite should not carry the image of Caesar, minted in the coins, but the curious thing is that currency appeared from the pocket of one of these deceitful men. With his reply Jesus illustrates the hypocrisy of those who despised "the bastard money"... but worked with it. Jesus changes the theme of the trap that they were creating, and with his reply he says to give the money the place that is appropriate; it is an instrument that does not have any kind of spiritual or religious connotation.

## Reflection

- (1) The universe has been created by God, so everything belongs to God. Discuss the fact that we are the object of the preferential love of God.
- (2) Should life be separated into the world of God and "Caesar's world"?
- (3) How should the Church intervene in matters of politics, economics, and the world?
- (4) How can we respond when a person approaches us with malice?
- (5) What do you think of Jesus's response? Do you think that it left things sufficiently clear?

## CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: *Lord of the day and night, of the beginning and of the end: At the closing of this meeting, once again we lift up our hearts to You, divine source of all life.*

All: **We thank you for the gifts you have bestowed on us. We thank you for the love expressed in companionship and understanding, mutual respect and shared ideas. We give you thanks for your holy power that will help us in our concerns that we have shared. For these and all the gifts that come from You, we give you thanks.**

Leader: *Lord hear our prayers* (attendees may propose their own petitions to God)

All: **In the same way in which we have being blessed by your presence as we met, we ask now to bless our safe return to our homes. May your holy blessing be over us + in the name of the Father and of the Son .....**

Leader: *May the King of the eternal glory gather us together in His heavenly banquet. Amen.*

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