

## Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Oct 22nd 2017

In today's first reading, Cyrus is called by God to be a liberator of His chosen people. The psalm passage reminds us of God's goodness and how we are called to respond. Paul's epistle gives encouragement to the Thessalonian community. In the Gospel, Jesus avoids a snare that is set for Him by responding with a statement on what should be expected by the civil authorities and what should be expected by God.

My reflection today centers on God's plan. I am not sure that individuals always immediately recognize how their particular experiences and actions fit into His bigger plan. In today's readings, we see contributions to Salvation History. I would like to think that we have a God who is still active in the world today.

Cyrus, also known as Cyrus the Great, extended his rule to a large section of the Near East during the 6th century BC. He respected the traditions of the regions that were under his control. After his conquest of Babylonia, he allowed the Jews that had been deported from Palestine to return. The first verses of Isaiah 45 describe God calling Cyrus to be the deliverer of the chosen people. Though never embracing Judaism himself, Cyrus played an integral role in the preservation of the Jewish people, their culture and their religion.

Thessalonica is one of several places where Paul made inroads, in spite of initially being forced to flee due to Jewish opposition. Paul's letter is written to a seedling community that was doing well. Without Paul's fervor and dedication, I personally doubt that Christianity would have grown and flourished the way that it did. I see Paul and his proclamation of Christianity to the Gentiles as part of that bigger plan.

In the Gospel, Jesus is given a question, the answer to which seemingly can only bring Him trouble. In being asked if it is right to pay taxes to a repressive government, He is set up to antagonize one group or another. Jesus expresses His frustration with those questioning Him. The Gospel records a wise response that allows for giving the government what it is due, while subjugating that to the service of God's plan.

My mother would say that there is a reason for everything. In today's world, not everyone buys into the idea of a bigger plan. We would like our world to thrive, but there are violent acts, injustices and natural disasters. There are many individuals who argue that who and what we are today is the result of chance and random events. I recently read comments from one of this year's Nobel Laureates expressing his hypothesis that not only consciousness, but also our sense of a transcendent are the results of natural selection. Are one's sense of beauty, one's feelings of love, and the empathetic actions, which one observes, signs of a plan in which God has a role?

There are times when things seem comfortable and clear. These are the moments when I find it easy to point to God's presence and God's plan in the world. Then the tide shifts. I can feel lost and discouraged. I can sympathize with the frustrations of Jesus and Paul. Fortunately, I can also imagine the moments in which they feel satisfaction. I can envision Cyrus, who some would call an infidel, as he is heralded as a messiah by the Jewish people.

When I was younger, I felt that I knew it all. It took moments of failure to recognize the gifts that had been visible before. It was the moments of hurt, like the loss of a someone close, that helped make me aware of the love that had been there. I have learned to see myself in the world having a purpose, a world that expounds the goodness of the divine plan. I can embrace the times of challenge and sorrow as a recognition that there were times of peace and joy. I can seek out the directions in which my time is spent as it should be, as a part of God's plan.

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