

Twenty-Ninth Sunday, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2011

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**First Reading: Isaiah 45:1, 4-6.**

Cyrus the Great, a pagan king, was to be the liberator of the Jewish people – so proclaims the Deutero-Isaiah. His poetic words were designed to raise the spirits of the Jewish exiles in Babylon. God will use this benevolent warrior king to bring about their liberation. The promised freedom will be achieved for them in a way they little suspected.

**Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1: 1-5.**

Within twenty years of Jesus' death, the team of Paul, Silvanus and Timothy were led by the Holy Spirit to go the strategic Roman port of Thessalonica on European soil. As usual they spoke in the local synagogue and a number believed their preaching.

Paul now praises them for their faith in action. He reminds them that in accepting his words they had received the power of the Holy Spirit who had invaded their lives and given them the utter conviction they now enjoy.

**Gospel: Matthew 22: 15-21.**

The unlikely combination of the Pharisees and Herodians join forces to trap Jesus. The Pharisees, zealous guardians of the Law, were hostile to the Roman occupation and despised the Herodians as usurpers. On the other hand, the Herodians carried favour with the Romans and cherished materialistic values – as did the Sadducees.

Their innocent looking enquiry was a trick. If Jesus said it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar he would alienate the nationalistic convictions of many Jews. If he said it was unlawful, the Herodians would denounce him to the authorities. Jesus' *solution* shows he does recognise civil authority but he then highlights the superior rights of God who must be honoured.

**Some Homily Starters:**

#1 Reading the *signs of the times*, a feature of Vatican II, is at least as old as the author of Isaiah. Who among the Jewish exiles thought the pagan king Cyrus could be an instrument of God's promised liberation? His wise and benevolent philosophy would see the Jews fully restored in Jerusalem. It took a faith-filled man of God to receive this insight and bring great encouragement to a discouraged and displaced Jewish nation.

Irish Catholics are in need some good news and help in seeing God at work in prophetic voices among and around them. What are some of the signs God is with them and will lead them through present sorrow and embarrassments? They are looking to their spiritual leaders.

#2 Evaluating leaders, schools, parish liturgies and Sundays' preacher is part and parcel of life nowadays. Who has not had to undergo a job evaluation? St Paul evaluated his believing community at Thessalonica and found much to praise. His analysis was that their faith and love in action was driven by their living union with Jesus. He said this was made possible by the Holy Spirit, whom they allowed to enter into their minds and hearts at the time of Paul's preaching.

Does the Irish Church and its leaders, both clerical and lay, need to imitate this evangelising approach? It means making sure they themselves are living and growing daily in union with Jesus. Saturated in Christ, they will be credible and equipped to lead people to discover the difference Christ makes to lives when they call on the Holy Spirit and allow his power and conviction to invade them. Togetherness in faith will be assured.

#3 There are two certainties in life – death and taxes. The Jews of Jesus' day had to pay a ground or harvest tax of 10%, a tax of 1% on income, and a poll tax on a full day's wages. The dilemma Jesus faced was as a very relevant issue to his listeners.

Jesus gave a profound solution that justified the right of legitimate civil powers to receive rates and taxes to finance the public purse. But, putting God the Father first supersedes all other considerations. By keeping one's eye on the target of life in eternity, it will ensure money and taxes will be seen for what they are – the means to the end. How do we keep it that way?

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