



TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

CYCLE A

Isaiah 45: 1, 4 - 6
1 Thessalonians 1: 1 - 5b
Matthew 22: 15 - 21

GATHERING

(Several pictures of people cut from magazines are arranged on a table in the gathering place. Across each is written, in large letters, "God's." A number of coins are spread among the pictures.)

This week's readings challenge us to prayerful discernment of the priorities in our lives. Last week, we reflected on God's invitation to his bountiful banquet. For whom did you provide nourishment this past week? *(Members share briefly.)*

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: In the beginning, God created man and woman in the divine image.

All: We are God's work of art created in the image of Christ Jesus to do the works of God.

(The community pauses for several minutes of reflection, after which members join in singing the song, "I Have Been Anointed." The song may be found on the Internet.)

Focus Question

Share an instance in your life when you found it difficult to decide whether you would be justified in taking some action.

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the gospel, the facilitator invites members to mention a word, a phrase or an image from one of the readings that particularly struck them. Members then read over the commentary and consider the questions in silence for several minutes before entering into conversation.)

Commentary

“Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?” Even if the Pharisees were asking out of a sincere desire to know, they would still be approaching the issue from the wrong end. We cannot determine the moral response to Caesar’s or anyone else’s authority unless we first consider, “What are God’s claims in this matter?”

The image and inscription on the coin may be Caesar’s, but human beings are created in God’s image. When we have sincerely reflected on our relationship to God and God’s vision of the right order of the universe, we can determine the best response to human authority and secular events. The burning question then becomes, “What does fidelity to God require of me right now? Cooperation? Dialogue? Confrontation?”

Jesus’ response to his questioners does not provide us with a simple cut-and-dried formula to apply to situations in our own lives. In specific circumstances, sincerely committed Christians may come up with differing answers to moral and political dilemmas. Jesus’ essential demand is that we make fidelity to God our primary value. Then other values will fall into place as parts of a larger picture. The response to this week’s psalm has it right: “Give the Lord glory and honor.” So does, for that matter, the motto on United States currency: “*In God we trust.*”

Our willingness to acknowledge God’s sovereignty does have its shadow side. From our narrow human perspective, we may be too quick to equate God’s way

with our way, to assume that, whatever the issue, “*God is on our side.*” The first reading provides a needed corrective. Israel’s self identity was wrapped around its consciousness of standing in a privileged position before God. It took a great leap of faith and humility for Isaiah to acknowledge that the Persian emperor, Cyrus, who did not even know Yahweh, was God’s chosen instrument. To Isaiah’s credit, he was able to recognize that God refuses to be enclosed in any nation’s or any person’s box. In our discernment of priorities we need to stay alert to the presence of God in surprising places.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

- ◆ How does the word, phrase or image that struck you from this week’s scriptures speak to your life or the life of the community, your family or your world these days?
- ◆ Describe one or two criteria you use to evaluate social and political issues. How does your faith enter into the equation?
- ◆ Describe an experience that made you aware of prejudice or narrowness in your own views.
- ◆ Speak about a time when you violated the letter of the law for the sake of some greater good.

RESPONSE IN ACTION

(The leader poses the question, “What does God ask of you/us in light of our sharing of life and faith this week?” After a few minutes of reflection, the leader invites conversation in response to the question.)

- ◆ Set aside twenty minutes some day this week to sit quietly. Just be; present to the world around you, present to our God.
- ◆ Listen to a radio or TV call-in program representing a viewpoint with which you do not sympathize. Make an effort to understand where the presenters are coming from even if you cannot support their stand.
- ◆ Attend a workshop or lecture that promotes understanding of a religious, cultural or ethnic group other than your own. For suggestions, check the calendar of events in your local newspaper or public library.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(A selection of instrumental music is played. When the music is complete, two members lead the community in prayer as follows.)

All: Give the Lord glory and honor.

I: 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.

All: Give the Lord glory and honor.

II: For great is the LORD and highly to be praised;
awesome is he, beyond all gods.
For all the gods of the nations are naught,
but the LORD made the heavens.

All: Give the Lord glory and praise.

I: 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.

All: Give the Lord glory and praise.

II: 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.

All: Give the Lord glory and praise.

Psalm 96: 1-13

*(Members stand in a circle and join hands. The session concludes with the praying of the **The Lord's Prayer.**)*