

29th Sunday Year A- October 18th, 2020

Living Out Our Religious and Civil Duties in Faith, Hope, and Love

In the readings, we see three different communities at different times of history. The first reading is about the community of Israel. The prophet, second-Isaiah, who lived in Babylonia with the exiled Jews, tells us, in God's own words, that he is the God, not only of the Jews but of history and of the whole world. Cyrus, who had become king of the Medes and the Persians, later extended his rule to include Syria, Babylon, Egypt. God declares that it was he who so exalted him "for the sake of Jacob," that the Jewish exiles could return to Judah and rebuild God's temple in Jerusalem. The reading describes the people of Israel who were in exile because they did not use rightly the great opportunity God gave them by making the chosen race.

Conversely, in the second reading is another community- Thessalonica, worthy of praise for their life of faith, hope, and charity. This is the first written document of the whole New Testament. St. Paul converted some Jews and many Gentiles in Thessalonica (northern Greece) in the summer of 50 A.D., during his second missionary journey. From there he went on to Athens and Corinth (Acts 17: 1-10), where he wrote this letter early in 51 A.D. He had had good news from the Church in Thessalonica in the meantime (his companion Timothy had gone back there on a visit), hence the very friendly tone of the letter. In the five verses read today, Paul praises his converts for "work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."

In the gospel we see another community in opposition to the good work of Christ, looking for the opportunity to find fault with him. Jesus patiently used the opportunity to teach us the lesson about the dual citizens we are, calling us to be mindful of our civic responsibilities as well as our religious obligations. This gospel has been interpreted out of context. Some have used it to support their argument on the separation of Church and state or drawing the line between life in the Church and life outside the Church. For us Christians, the best interpretation we can give to this gospel has to be grounded on the fact that everything belongs to God.

Consequently, our religious obligations have to be connected to our civic responsibilities. The peace, the love, mercy, and justice we experience in God's presence in the Church have to be seen in our civil life. The question we have to ask ourselves will be: What do I do in my workplace that supports the gospel I believe in? These are the things God wants us to continue. On the other hand, what do I do in my workplace that opposes the Gospel? These are the things God is calling us to take another look at. Also, like St. Paul encouraged the Thessalonians, God wants us to continue with our work of faith, the labor of love, and steadfastness of hope. May we ask God that in our religious and civil duties we continue to experience the gifts of his Theological virtues- Faith, Hope and Love, he has given to us. Amen.

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16)