

Homily Helps – October 22, 2023
Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time
World Mission Sunday

Each scripture reading at Mass today invites us to appreciate the connection between our personal, deeply-held loyalties and what projects we try to accomplish in life.

The first reading introduces us to Cyrus the Persian, a ruler who ends up being a surprising, yet still very effective, instrument used by the Lord to bring freedom to the Chosen People. (Cyrus, a foreigner and not a Jew, is loyal to his political and military duty, but he achieves what the Lord arranges for him to accomplish because he allows God to work through him.)

In the second reading, Paul and his companions are inspired by loyalty to their mission to proclaim the Good News. But as serious as they are about their own mission, their hearts are open and generous enough to appreciate how other people -- the Christians in Thessalonica, specifically -- are involved in that same work of proclaiming the Gospel in their own way and in their own place.

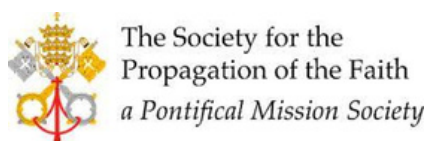
Most strikingly, in the Gospel reading, we hear what Jesus does when he knows he is walking into a trap. This trap presents what could be an unresolvable challenge to personal loyalty. What is owed to Caesar and what is owed to God? In response, Jesus speaks the truth in a simple way. He asks those around him to consider the standards by which they owe things to an authority, in other words, where their loyalties lie. Jesus helps them -- and us -- acknowledge that while we owe our loyalty ultimately to God, we often must honor that by respecting our duties toward others.

Discipleship requires us to consider to whom I belong; where my loyalties lie; and whom I must serve. Surely each of us is called and strives to remain faithful to some duties in our own place -- towards our families, jobs, neighborhoods, and friends. But if we are to take our faith seriously, we are also concerned about others who are far away from us. These connections to others pull on us especially when we see them in light of our personal relationship with Jesus.

As Christians, we are invested with duties of love for people we have never met and to places we have never been, which is the theme at the heart of the readings for today, World Mission Sunday. That is part of the work of mission: to deepen the connections that already exist between me and someone far away from me to whom I am united in Christ. Perhaps this person is already a Christian and so we are mystically united by our common baptism. Or maybe this person is just now learning of Christ (or desires to know of Christ) and that introduction will be made possible by the work of people who are sent to share the Good News with them. This appreciation might even help me to find the energy and interest to collaborate in work that I personally cannot do because I have responsibilities where I am and cannot go to those places and meet those people. But I can be part of the work through supportive prayer and practical charity.

May the grace we receive in this Eucharist help us all to learn the truth of these loyalties, responsibilities, and connections. And going from this place of worship may we find the energy to deepen our personal commitment to our common Christian mission to announce Christ and his Gospel to all the world.

Let us join our Holy Father Pope Francis in praying for and sharing resources with the young, persecuted, and poor Church in over 1,100 dioceses around the world that benefit from the World Mission Sunday collection, taken in every Catholic parish today, no matter how big or small.



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