

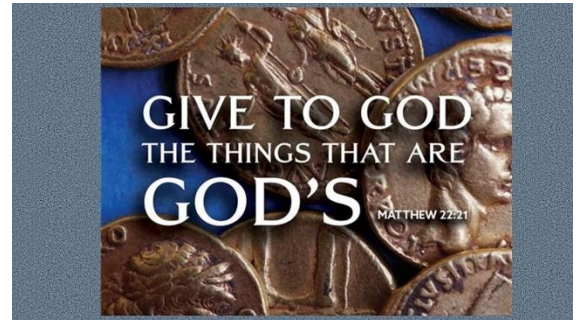
The Readings on This Day

****Click on the links for the Bible Verse(s)*

Sunday, October 16–22

Lectionary 29

This Sunday all three readings allude to the relationship of believers to their civil government. Contemplating this complex word, we go for sustenance to the table.



[Isaiah 45:1-7](#)

Even the enemy king who follows an alien religion can be seen by a believer as an instrument of God. The passage is chosen to complement the Matthew reading. Cyrus, like the Roman emperor, is an enemy king, who can be tolerated, even praised, by those faithful to the Lord. The Isaiah passage affirms that it is the Lord, the Creator of all, who can make use of even evil authorities. Also this passage has afforded Christians biblical support for both sides of the debate as to whether an evil government is actually serving God.

[The Psalm for the Day](#)

We respond to the Isaian oracle that surprisingly calls Cyrus “God’s anointed” by singing [Psalm 96:1-9 \[10-13\]](#), which some scholars refer to as an enthronement psalm. Perhaps sung at a ceremony honoring the Israelite king, the psalm praises the Lord as king. Other gods are idols. The Lord is God over “the nations,” “all peoples,” not only the Israelites. We sing this psalm next time on Christmas Eve, for as Christians, we give the title Lord also to the newborn Jesus.

[1 Thessalonians 1:1-10](#)

Today begins five Sundays of a semicontinuous reading of 1 Thessalonians. Especially if we know the political situation of Thessalonica, the reading from Paul is poignant on this Sunday. In a city famous for its loyalty to the Roman emperor, a young Christian community that is being persecuted is praised as a model of faithfulness to Christ Jesus. Jesus, not Emperor Claudius, is Lord.

[Matthew 22:15-22](#)

Jesus’ ambiguity in responding to the Pharisees’ question resembles the enigmatic parables for which Jesus is known. The “kingdom of heaven” about which Matthew has repeatedly written is not a phenomenon somehow equivalent to the kingdom of Rome. Rather, it is the life shared by those who accept the authority of God. The “head” that we carry is Christ, our “title” is Christian. The ambiguity of Jesus’ answer has allowed for great diversity within Christian communities concerning the appropriate attitude toward civil authority.