

29th Sunday, Year A, Xavier Church, Isa 45:1,4-6; Ps 96; 1 Thess 1:1-5b; Mt 22:15-21.

Fr. Ward Biemans SJ

Dear brothers and sisters, in the Gospel we hear Jesus' words: 'Give to the emperor what is due to the emperor, and to God what is due to God.' It is a call to indeed obey the directives of the government, but not to lose sight of the fact that we give to God what is due to Him.

Thank goodness you have come to church this afternoon. Going to church together is a way of expressing our gratitude to God for the good we receive from Him and asking for what we need, for ourselves and for the world we live in, including all the misery that abounds in so many places in these days. St Paul, who faced many persecutions and difficulties, still expresses gratitude in his letter to the Christians of Thessalonica. All the good things that surround us, nature, the people around us, the faith and love we experience and share with others, ultimately come from God after all. Our connection with God's creation, we can experience it outside in nature, or in art or music.

In today's first reading, we hear very clearly the Lord's call: I am the Lord, and no one else! It is striking, that the Lord makes this revelation known to Cyrus, the king of Persia. Cyrus did not believe in the God of Israel because he did not know Him. But he does come to Israel's aid after this revelation in the battle against the surrounding nations. This is how our dear Lord works, He seeks out those who do not yet believe in Him and at the same time He remains faithful to those who do believe in Him. Perhaps in our daily lives we too can enter into conversation with people and tell them about the goodness of God, about the joy He wants to give us.

The Gospel points us to the right relationships between the material things that surround us and the divine. In the coming week, we can dwell more on those in need, including those further away from us. This Sunday is Mission Sunday.

This year's motto is: 'With burning hearts'. This is a reference to the disciples who were on their way to Emmaus and meet the risen Jesus without recognising Him.

Later, they remember His words and say to each other: 'Did not our hearts burn within us as He spoke to us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?' They recognise Jesus when He breaks bread with them.

Pope Francis writes in his letter for Mission Sunday that in this context, we should remember that breaking the common bread with the hungry in the name of Christ is already a Christian missionary act. How much more, then, is the breaking of the

Eucharistic bread, which is Christ himself, eminently an act of mission, because the Eucharist is source and culmination of the life and mission of the Church.

In this year's World Mission Month of October, focus is on Lebanon, a very appropriate choice given the disastrous situation in the Middle-East. From the papal missionary works, funds are being raised for pastoral work in the capital Beirut. After the huge explosion in Beirut's port three years ago, parishioners of St Maron want to help people in the neighbourhood. In addition, they support Syrian refugees who fled the civil war to neighbouring Lebanon. There they live in camps and in Beirut's poorer neighbourhoods. Among them are many children. The Sisters of the Good Shepherd teach Syrian refugee children at their social centre. For these children, it is the only chance of education as they are not allowed to attend Lebanese state schools.

October is not only mission month, but also a Marian month. It is good to honour Mary regularly by praying the Rosary. We can ask her for protection of those defenceless against aggression and violence and for her motherly care for those affected by war. God loves us all and has chosen us to listen to the Gospel and put it into practice, as Paul writes 'not only with words but with power and Holy Spirit and full conviction'. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit continues to work in us too. Amen.