

30TH SUND. ORD. (A)
BECOME A MODEL FOR ALL BELIEVERS

St. Paul is commending the Church in Thessalonica for being a model for the faithful in Macedonia and Achaia, and beyond. They received the word of God and they turned from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven. Their faith had spread in such a way that Paul and his companions did not need to say anything.

They received the word of God, which enabled them to obey the commandment by turning away from idols and started loving God. Their faith and love became contagious and affected all the Churches in Macedonia and Achaia and beyond.

The faithful in Thessalonica lived according to what the first reading and the gospel present to us today. They put into practice what they heard from Paul and they imitated him and the Lord. The believers showed love, and cared for those in need among them; the widows and orphans, and strangers, as God directed in the first reading.

We too have received the word of God as the believers in Thessalonica did, but have we become imitators of the Lord? Do we love God with our whole heart, our whole soul, and whole mind? Have we turned away from our former way of life?

What shows that we love God? Jesus told His disciples, "Whoever holds to my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me; and whoever loves me will be loved by my Father and I shall love him and reveal myself to him," (Jn. 14:21). We have twenty-four hours in a day, what percentage of this period is dedicated to God? What about the seven days in the week?

God is always attending to us in so many ways by means of the things He has entrusted to our care, and the work of His angels. But we do not have time for Him. Even the one day that we have to worship Him is also occupied with other things. Sometimes it seems as if coming to Church is to do Him a favour. This also applies to the offering we give. Our attitude is like the Jews who were interested in just obeying the law

without showing love. As Jesus said, the whole law is based on love of God and neighbour.

Very soon, we shall drink from the cup, the Blood of Christ. Of what does it remind us? It is the suffering He went through to save me and you. That is the love He is talking about. Do we love Him to the extent of sharing in His suffering?

The Church in Thessalonica became a model for many people; how have we been models in the Church here, in our homes, our work places, and the community? How do we show our faith and love in the Lord? How do we accommodate people with different opinions and ideas? We often sing, "What-so-ever you do to the least of my people, that you do unto me," (Mt.25:31ff). Who are the people Jesus is talking about? The Lord God said to the Israelites that He would treat them the way they would treat strangers or aliens, or the marginalized.

"Whoever does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you are well aware that no murderer has eternal life remain in him. This is the proof of love, that He laid down His life for us, and we too ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. Children, our love must be not just words or mere talk, but something active and genuine," (1Jn. 3:15-16&18). "Anyone who says I love God and hates his brother is a liar, since whoever does not love his brother whom he can see cannot love God whom he has not seen," (1Jn. 4:20).

We have countless models who served God with their whole heart, soul and mind - Mary, the prophets and apostles, the martyrs, and other saints. Are we trying to be models? Are we just obeying the rules, or is our worship, relationship with people, charitable works, and other things guided by love? "Imitate me as I imitate Christ," (1Cor. 11:1). Can I say this with St. Paul?

29TH SUND. ORD. (A)
I HAVE CALLED YOU BY NAME; YOU ARE MINE

“And now, thus says the Lord, He who created you, Jacob, who formed you, Israel: Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine,” (Isa. 43:1). “So there is to be no boasting about human beings; everything belongs to you, whether it is Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, the world, life or death, the present or the future - all belong to you; but you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God,” (1Cor. 3:21-23).

In the first reading, we heard that God chose Cyrus to be king to be used for His purpose, that is, to allow the Israelites return to their homelands. He gave him power to open and close, which no one could counteract it. Even though he could not know God everything he could accomplish came from God. Through Cyrus people would know God who has no equal.

In the gospel, Jesus responded to the question of whether to pay tax or not by asking for a coin. And since it had the image of Caesar, He asked them to give to him what belongs to him, and to God what belongs to God. The question now is 'what belongs to God?'.

The simple answer is that everything in the world belongs to God. But we often claim ownership of many things in the world. We forget that even if we claim ownership of properties, we belong to God. He created us in His own image and likeness, "God created man in the image of Himself, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them," (Gen. 1:27). So if the coin had the image of Caesar, you and I have the image of God, and so we belong to Him.

As God chose Cyrus to be an instrument, so Paul in the second reading, is telling the faithful in Thessalonica that God had chosen them to be His own. In the same manner, we all have been chosen by God and we belong to Him. He wants to use us as instruments to bring salvation to the whole world. Whatever we can do is not by our own strength, but by His power, as He held the right hand of Cyrus to subdue nations and uncover the loins of kings.

Each and everyone has been called by name. God knows us through and through. The Corinthians were clinging to Peter or Paul or Apollos, but Paul told them that everything belonged to them but they belonged to Christ and Christ belonged to God. Everything ends up at the doorstep of God.

If that is the case, then what can we boast of? Power, or wealth, or strength, or wisdom, or knowledge, or beauty, or success in life? Everything comes from Him through Him and for Him. This means that we should always aim at doing what pleases him. Again, before we do things or take any decision, we should let His will lead us, as Jesus prayed in the garden, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not as I will, but as you will," (Mt. 26:39b).

If we bear God's image, and that we belong to Him, then we cannot decide what to do with our body contrary to what He wants us to use it for. Also we cannot decide to end our lives or the lives of people whether born or unborn.

The gospel also reminds us of how we should contribute to the welfare of our nation and the world. Whatever gift we have received should be used to the benefit of all. This is because we compliment each other. Each has the image of God and must be respected, no matter who they are, or from which part of the world. Everybody has something to offer to the glory of God. Even though we are to serve our country, allegiance to God should come first.