

Theological Virtues: Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cyrus the Great

Central idea: [Faith, hope, and love](#). Doctrine: [The theological virtues](#). Practical application: [Exercising the theological virtues more effectively](#).

Lectionary 145.

[Central idea: Faith, hope, and love](#)

Reading 1 [Is 45:1, 4-6](#)

Thus says the LORD to his anointed, Cyrus,
 whose right hand I grasp,
 subduing nations before him,
 and making kings run in his service,
 opening doors before him
 and leaving the gates unbarred:
 For the sake of Jacob, my servant,
 of Israel, my chosen one,
 I have called you by your name,
 giving you a title, though you knew me not.
 I am the LORD and there is no other,
 there is no God besides me.
 It is I who arm you, though you know me not,
 so that toward the rising and the setting of the sun
 people may know that there is none besides me.
 I am the LORD, there is no other.

- Though he was a gentile, King Cyrus the Great was a messiah for the Chosen People. He conquered the known world, including Babylon, where the Chosen People were enslaved in exile. He gave permission for the Jews who wished to return to Israel to go home. He even gave men and materiel to rebuild the Temple.
- Though Cyrus did not know the Lord, the Lord chose him and gave him the means to be his instrument. This was for the sake of Israel and for all throughout the world who would learn of Israel's God.
- The greatest desire of the faithful Chosen People in exile—the object of their hope—was to return to the Promised Land. Cyrus was the fulfillment of their hope.

Responsorial Psalm [Ps 96:1, 3, 4-5, 7-8, 9-10](#)

R. Give the Lord glory and honor.

Sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all you lands.
Tell his glory among the nations;
among all peoples, his wondrous deeds.

For great is the LORD and highly to be praised;
awesome is he, beyond all gods.
For all the gods of the nations are things of nought,
but the LORD made the heavens.

Give to the LORD, you families of nations,
give to the LORD glory and praise;
give to the LORD the glory due his name!
Bring gifts, and enter his courts.

Worship the LORD, in holy attire;
tremble before him, all the earth;
say among the nations: The LORD is king,
he governs the peoples with equity.

- Ancient peoples mistakenly thought there were many gods, but the Chosen People were taught by God himself that there is only one. This is the faith of Israel.
 - As Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI put it in *Deus Caritas Est* ("God is Love"), Israel learned from God Himself that the entire universe is a creation of the one true God who loves man (no. 9).
- It is right to give God glory and praise because he is the creator and benefactor of all human beings.
- It is right for every human being on earth to worship and obey the one true God. This is why the Church is always evangelical.
- There is only one God in existence whom we should love.

Reading 2 [1 Thes 1:1-5b](#)

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians
in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:
grace to you and peace.

We give thanks to God always for all of you,
 remembering you in our prayers,
 unceasingly calling to mind your work of faith and labor of love
 and endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ,
 before our God and Father,
 knowing, brothers and sisters loved by God,
 how you were chosen.
 For our gospel did not come to you in word alone,
 but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with much conviction.

- The church of the Thessalonians is Trinitarian. It is “in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” and “in the Holy Spirit.”
- These Thessalonians are members of the Church because they are chosen and loved by God. So are we.
- Paul also recognizes at work in them what we call the theological virtues: “your work of *faith* and labor of *love* and endurance in *hope*.”

Gospel [Mt 22:15-21](#)

The Pharisees went off
 and plotted how they might entrap Jesus in speech.
 They sent their disciples to him, with the Herodians, saying,
 “Teacher, we know that you are a truthful man
 and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.
 And you are not concerned with anyone’s opinion,
 for you do not regard a person’s status.
 Tell us, then, what is your opinion:
 Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?”
 Knowing their malice, Jesus said,
 “Why are you testing me, you hypocrites?
 Show me the coin that pays the census tax.”
 Then they handed him the Roman coin.
 He said to them, “Whose image is this and whose inscription?”
 They replied, “Caesar’s.”
 At that he said to them,
 “Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar
 and to God what belongs to God.”

- These crafty Pharisees want to get Our Lord into trouble with either the Jews or the Roman authorities.
 - They begin by deceptively flattering him. They attribute to him a goodness that they don't believe he possesses: "you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth." If they believed *that*, they would follow him.
 - They ask him if it is in accordance with God's law to pay the census tax, which in effect recognizes the legitimate authority of the Roman Empire.
- Our Lord here introduces "the distinction between serving God and serving the political community" (CCC 2242).
 - Civil government has legitimate authority when it serves the common good.
 - What do we owe to God? Many things, but chief among them as Christians are faith, hope, and, above all, love.

Doctrine: The theological virtues

- The theological virtues of faith, hope, and love that Paul recognizes at work in the Thessalonians are gifts given to all the baptized.
- They are called theological because they "dispose Christians to live in a relationship with the Holy Trinity. They have God for their origin, their motive, and their object—God known by faith, God hoped in and loved for his own sake." (CCC 1840)
 - They have God as their origin because God gives them to us at baptism—they are not "natural" to us.
 - They have God as their motive because they move us to act in a way pleasing to God.
 - They have God as their object or end because they make it possible for us to reach God.
- "By *faith*, we believe in God and believe all that he has revealed to us and that Holy Church proposes for our belief" (CCC 1842).
- "By *hope* we desire, and with steadfast trust await from God, eternal life and the graces to merit it" (CCC 1843).
- "By *charity*, we love God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves for love of God" (CCC 1844).

- Charity is Christ's "new commandment" (CCC 1823), the most important of the theological virtues, and superior to every moral virtue (CCC 1826).
- Faith, hope, and charity "inform all the moral virtues and give life to them" (CCC 1841).
 - What does it mean that these virtues "inform" the moral virtues and "give them life"? It means that as children of God, we practice every other virtue according to and for the sake of these virtues. The theological virtues give each moral virtue a direction and make it possible for us to go in that direction.
 - For example, we practice chastity because it is part of our faith (Our Lord taught that anyone who looks at a woman with lust in his heart has already committed adultery). We practice chastity out of hope (recall Our Lord's beatitude that the pure of heart will see God). We practice chastity out of love (we love God, our spouse if we are married, and other persons more than we love the enjoyment of this passion).
 - Or, we are patient with others due to faith—because Our Lord said we will get from God what we give to others, and we want God to be patient with us. We are patient due to hope—whatever irksome person or situation we have to endure is only temporary and heaven is forever. We are patient because it is a quality of love—love endures all things.

Practical application: Exercising the theological virtues more effectively

- Faith, hope, and love are gifts of grace with which we cooperate. We don't go out and get them the way a soldier acquires courage through his training. We *have* these virtues through Baptism and receive an increase in them in all the other sacraments. So, it is important to stay in a state of grace and to frequent the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Frequent Communion is also a way to increase our possession of these virtues. If we are married or in Holy Orders, we have the graces to act out of faith, hope, and love in these states of life.
- But what can we do on our part? After all, St. Paul refers to "your work of faith and labor of love and endurance in hope."

- We can *ask*. Like the apostles who asked Our Lord, “increase my faith” (Lk 17:5), or the father of the boy with seizures who said, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mk 9:24), we can ask God to increase our faith, hope, and love. This can be done in set prayers (e.g., an [Act of Faith](#)) or in our own words.
- Our growth in faith, hope, and love are greatly assisted *by mental prayer*. Mental prayer is a dialogue with Our Lord. When we talk with God about what is on our minds, what is going on in our lives, and what he wants us to do, we see reality more clearly, including the acts God wants us to perform.
 - If we pray about a problem of faith, for example, God may give us a solution, even if the solution is just to trust what the Church teaches.
 - Or we may realize we are sad because of some setback or rejection or fear and see we need more hope, and so make an act of hope and go on.
 - Or we see more clearly the acts of love God wants us to perform, like do that task, talk to that person, help that person, ask forgiveness, or forgive, and so on.
- Most importantly, we grow in faith, hope, and love, *by performing acts in accord with each virtue*.
 - For example, if there is a detail of Catholic belief or morals we have a hard time accepting, yet we are certain it is what the Church teaches, we accept that Catholic truth, defend it as best we can, and attempt to live it. That is a *work* of faith.
 - Or if we get discouraged in any way, we keep going anyway, trusting in God’s goodness. That is our *endurance* in hope.
 - We certainly have opportunities to love God and neighbor every day, all day. That is our *labor* of love.

The Homiletic Directory recommends the following Catechism points and themes for the Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time:

- CCC 1897-1917: participation in the social sphere;
- CCC 2238-2244: duties of citizens.

REF.: DOCTRINAL HOMILIES OUTLINE