



a Kendall Hunt Company

Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session, read all the readings.

Isaiah 45:1, 4-6

Psalm 96:1, 3, 4-5, 7-8, 9-10

1 Thessalonians 1:1-5

Matthew 22:15-21

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Is there a particular reading that appeals to you? Is there a word or image that engages you?

RCL Benziger
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Read the following **Word in Liturgy** and **Catholic Doctrine** sections. Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need.

The Word In Liturgy

In the rise to power of Cyrus, pagan king of Persia, Deutero-Isaiah sees the hand of Yahweh at work. The decision of Cyrus, after his conquest of Babylon, to repatriate all of the subject peoples within its boundaries was judged a miraculous proof that the God of Israel held power over the entire earth. In this passage, the prophet imitates the literary style of a royal decree. It was Babylonian custom to announce the king's accession to the throne by saying that the god Bel-Marduk had "grasped the king by his right hand." Here, it is Yahweh who calls Cyrus his "anointed . . . whose right hand I grasp" (v. 1). It is remarkable (only here in the entire

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Jewish scriptures) to hear a pagan referred to as God's "anointed" (in Hebrew, "Messiah," or Greek, "Christ"), a term used only of kings, prophets, and priests in Israel. The passage is a forceful statement of Yahweh's sovereignty over even the most powerful of earthly rulers and, by implication, over their gods. Yahweh is understood at this point in the development of Israel's religious thought to be Lord even of history, in control of the fate of nations as well as the forces of nature. This is an important passage in the consolidation of the absolute monotheism of the Jewish people ("I am the Lord and there is no other, there is no God besides me," v. 5).

Our doctrinal focus today on the first commandment is further supported by the gospel story of Jesus' teaching regarding the competing claims of civil and religious authority. The coin which Jesus asked for (he apparently did not have one; his opponents did) would have had the image of Caesar on it, in addition to an inscription proclaiming Caesar as sovereign. For the pious Jew schooled in the prohibition of graven images, such a coin was a constant reminder of the idolatrous claims of the Caesar. Jesus scores a point against his adversaries merely by the fact that they carried such an idolatrous image. Their possession of the coin of tribute was evocative of the many ways they were collaborators with their Roman overlords. Jesus' clever response might be interpreted as saying, "Give back to Caesar his idolatrous coin; have nothing to do with it. Give to God his due—everything!" Thus, rather than engage in a superficial dispute over separation of church and state, Jesus reasserts the absolute claim of Jewish monotheism, namely, that all earthly powers are subject to Yahweh's sovereignty. This pericope is part of the larger unit of Matthew (21:23-22:14) in which he details the growing antagonism between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders. Nothing could be more fundamental to Jewish faith than the first commandment of the Torah, and Matthew shows how vast the rift has grown between Jesus and his adversaries.

Catholic Doctrine

"I Am the Lord, There Is No Other"

Catholics believe that, according to divine revelation, God is shown to be a loving God who has created the human race and brought us out of bondage. The people chosen as God's own were constituted by divine favor and, as a mark of God's love and power, were freed from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 20:2-5). The covenant God who liberated these our spiritual forebears from slavery demanded acceptance and service and worship from his people (Matthew 4:10). The first of the Ten Commandments, therefore, most fittingly concerns the unique loyalty that is due to God from the chosen people: "You shall not have other gods

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besides me" (Exodus 20:3).

Our Catholic faith also attests that the God in whom we place our trust is constant and unchanging. God, who is perfect, remains always the same, faithful, just, and without evil. Given such perfection, it is clearly a privilege to follow and accept the covenant relationship of mercy and goodness that God offers us in Jesus. Indeed, the question becomes, who would want to reject or not follow such a God? (CCC 2086)

In our changing human history the unchanging God continues to reveal an overwhelming divine graciousness that reaches out, again and again, to save us. That divine graciousness is mirrored in our own hearts and lives by the virtues of faith, hope, and love. These three virtues help explain how we are to respond to the first commandment.

First of all, the source of our salvation, the foundation of authentic life, the impetus for our own moral and upright living, is found in God. We believe, therefore, that our first stance toward this loving God should be faith, to believe in the Most High and to proclaim that belief in our words and deeds (CCC 2087). Thus, Catholics strive to nourish one another's faith and to protect our relationship to the one God, for faith is a precious gift that underlies everything we are. The willful disregard of revealed truth, that is, voluntary doubt, is a sin against faith and offends against the first commandment (CCC 2088). This is to be distinguished from questioning and exploring the revealed truth so that a better understanding may be derived from this exploration.

Second, because of our own limited power, we humans cannot envision all that God has in store for us. We believe, therefore, that when God reveals and we are called to respond to the Almighty's revelation, we must hope that the Most High will give us the ability to love God in return (CCC 2090). Hope affords us the confident expectation of divine goodness and beatitude and helps us to resist the depths of despair or the presumption that we can rely only on ourselves for salvation (CCC 2091-92).

Third, we believe the first commandment enjoins upon us the joy of loving God above

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everything and all others (CCC 2093). We fail to love God, for example, when we engage in indifference to divine goodness and ingratitude for divine blessings (CCC 2094). Since Jesus linked loving God to loving neighbor (see next Sunday), the failure to love God is also shown in the same kind of indifference and ingratitude rendered toward our neighbor. In addition, our response to God in love moves us toward the virtue of religion (CCC 2095).

The word itself, “religion,” derives from Latin (re, meaning “again,” and ligatio, “to tie,” as in “ligament”). The adoration, prayer, and sacrifice (CCC 2096–99) rendered to God by our religious attitude and actions, the promise we make as we give of ourselves to the divine by the practice of religion, ties us or binds us to God and to one another in faith, hope, and love. Superstition and idolatry (the worship of false gods) break those bonds and draw us away from the one, true God.

