

## PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, YEAR C

### Second Reading 2 Thessalonians 2: 16 – 3: 5

This week, last week and again next week we are reading and praying the Second letter of St Paul to the Thessalonians. Scholars argue about the authorship of this letter. Its structure is very similar to the First letter to the Thessalonians whose authorship is not challenged, but its key ideas seem to be written in a different style, even though only a few months separate the two. At all events, they are among the earliest documents of the New Testament and give a good depiction of the life and concerns of the young Christian church which Paul established with his friends Sylvanus and Timothy, some twenty years after the Ascension (see Acts 17: 1–9).

The port city of Thessalonica in Macedonia is the modern city of Thessalonike in northern Greece. The young Christians seem to be almost entirely a Gentile congregation who would have gathered in their homes for worship as there were no churches built at this early time. They seem to have received a thorough grounding in Christian beliefs.

This letter is essentially concerned with the End of Time and the second coming of the Lord. It is a source of courage and patience when confronted with tribulation.



This week's verses are two prayers. The first one is for personal strength in faith and good deeds, in the 'sure hope' of the Lord's return, while the second is for those who minister to us.

## Gospel Luke 20: 27–38

### Jesus speaks to the Sadducees

Jesus has previously been confronted by the Scribes and Pharisees, whom he has shamed into silence. He is now facing further opposition from the Sadducees. It is the only time they are mentioned in Luke's Gospel.



#### The Sadducees

They were a Jewish group drawn mainly from the priestly classes, but included many upper-class laymen. They did not believe in the resurrection or in angels, and held only the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament (the Torah), as authoritative. Sadducees scorned Pharisees – both their 'modern' beliefs and their

interpretation of the Law. They believed that the after-life was a continuation of this life which would still involve marriage.

#### The Sadducees' question

They ask a trick question, hoping to trap Jesus into denouncing the Pharisees' belief in bodily resurrection or allowing polyandry (having several husbands) which was considered immoral. They do so by quoting Moses on Levirate marriage (from the Latin *levir*, brother-in-law), which required a man to marry the widow of his deceased brother if the brother had died without a son (see Deuteronomy 25: 5–10).

#### Jesus's response

Jesus shows his authority by also quoting the Law of Moses, meeting them on their own ground and defeating them. He quotes from Exodus 3: 1–6. The Sadducees are silenced because they cannot refute the words of the Pentateuch. To the argument about the resurrection, Luke adds one about immortality in v. 38b, '*... for to him all men are in fact alive.*'