

In company with Silvanus and Timothy, Paul greets the new Christians of Thessalonica, giving thanks for their faith and their conversion from idols to the worship of the true and living God. This letter was written not long after Paul's first missionary visit to this city in the country we know today as Greece. Evidently the converts were all former pagans. The apostle refers to the troubles and persecution that are also reported in the Acts of the Apostles. But the gospel, empowered by the activity of the Holy Spirit, has inspired a faith which has become widely known.

And now the reading from First Thessalonians

Paul, Silas and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace and peace to you.

We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia - your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead - Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God**

Matthew 22:15-22

In our gospel lesson Jesus answers a question about taxation by teaching that people should pay what belongs to the emperor to the emperor and the things of God to God. The question was meant as a trap. If Jesus advised the paying of taxes to the occupying Roman powers, many Jews would have considered him a collaborator. Had he counseled nonpayment, the Herodian servants to the Romans could accuse him of sedition. On one level Jesus' answer is a masterstroke of clever ambiguity, but it also causes his hearers to reflect more deeply on their responsibility to God and the state. Perhaps the saying suggests that government has its legitimate yet limited claims. It must not be given the highest allegiance.

Hear now these words from the gospel of Matthew

Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax^[a] to Caesar or not?"

But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?"

"Caesar's," they replied.

Then he said to them, "So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

Liturgist: This is the gospel message of our Lord and Savior

All: May the reading and the hearing of Your word inform our minds, comfort our souls, and guide our feet.