

Lectionary readings: Isaiah 45: 1-7; Psalm 96: 1-9. (10-13); 1 Thessalonians 1: 1-10; Matthew 22: 15-22

For reflection and prayer

- **Isaiah 45:** God's people are in exile and it will be through Cyrus, the Persian king, that they will be set free and allowed to return to their own land. Anyone can be used by God to fulfil His purposes. *'I am God, the only God there is.'* (v6) God is the God of light and darkness, the God of the good times and bad times. (v7) So whatever we are going through, let's find God with us, giving thanks if things are going well, and willing to learn from God, deepen our faith and dependence on Him, if things are going badly.
- **Psalm 96:** A psalm of praise encouraging us to sing of God's glory and tell everyone about the amazing things God does. We might like to reflect on what God has done for us this past week. v9: *'Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness'* (Hymn 201 CH4) is a good hymn to reflect on this week. In verses 10 - 13 we have a lovely picture of the whole of creation bursting forth in praise to God, rejoicing in being and acknowledging their relationship to God. So let's join the created world in singing God's praises this week. Take a walk in the country and let your heart sing.
- **1 Thessalonians 1:** In the introduction to this letter, Paul says: *'God's amazing grace be with you.'* (The Message) From this passage we see how Paul prayed daily for the Christians in the churches he founded, thanking God for their faith, love, patience, hope. Paul sees the people of the Thessalonian church as special:

God loves them dearly and has laid His hand on them in a special way. The Holy Spirit has been and is at work in them. They are full of joy, despite the suffering they have experienced. *'You're the message,'* says Paul in v7. They have embraced God and serve God. What message are we giving out to the community by how we live, how we speak, how we act towards people?

- **Matthew 22:** The Pharisees ask Jesus the question: *'Is it right to pay taxes to the Roman government or not?'* Jesus' reply is: *'Give to Caesar what belongs to him. But everything that belongs to God must be given to God.'* (NLT v21) Notice that Jesus doesn't tell us what to do; He challenges us to work things out for ourselves. Is there such a thing as a secular/sacred divide? Is not the whole of life in all its aspects sacred? How we live in this world is an expression of our giving of ourselves to God. God, who has given us everything, deserves our total self-giving. There is much to challenge us here this week.

A prayer

All that I am is yours, Lord, all that I try to be. All that I ever hope for, all that I long to see. Because of your love, in joy I give it to you.

All I have been is yours, Lord, all that I did and said. All that I planned and worked for, all in my heart and head. Because of your touch, in praise I give it to you.

All I shall be is yours, Lord, all that I will make mine. All future hurts and failures, all sadness, joy and wine. Because of your strength, in faith I give it to you.

All that you are you gave us. And through all that is given. We give you all that we are; we give you our living. In joy, in praise, in growing hope, in dumbfounded thanksgiving.

(Donald Hilton)