

Proper 24
Cycle A RCL
Revised

Exodus 33:12-23

In last week's reading, Moses convinced the Lord not to destroy Israel for the sin of the golden calf by arguing that God would lose face before the Egyptians if he did so (Exodus 32:12). In today's reading the Lord, having grudgingly given into Moses' entreaties yet having also severely punished his people, now proposes that an angel precede Israel into the Promised Land lest the Lord's anger break out against them again (33:1-4). This suggestion is unacceptable to Moses and he talks the Lord out of his decision by reference to God's promise that God, not an angel, will go before the people into the land. Again, the issue is God's public reputation (33:12-17). This time, however, Moses wants to seal the bargain by having God appear to him in person. The apparent contradiction between Exodus 33:11 where the Lord is said to speak to Moses "face to face" and Exodus 33:20 where the Lord tells Moses that he cannot see his face is the result of the presence of both the Yahwist writer (33:11) and the Elohist (33:20). See also Genesis 32:30 (E).

Psalm 99

This *hymn* is called by some interpreters an *enthronement psalm* based on the belief that it was used as part of a yearly enthronement ceremony in which Israel recognized Yahweh as king. The *cherubim* (1:1, singular: *cherub*) are winged sphinxes, very common in the royal iconography of the near east. The Ark of the Covenant, on which Yahweh sat, featured figures of cherubim that comprised his throne. This hymn celebrates Yahweh's permanent residence in Jerusalem (Zion) as righteous judge and lawgiver.

OR

Isaiah 45:1-7

The Jews in exile in Babylon made no secret of their glee over the successes of Babylon's enemy, Cyrus the Great of Persia, whose gigantic army made its way inexorably toward Babylon and ultimately took the city bloodlessly in October of 539 BCE. Second Isaiah, the author responsible for the oracles in Isaiah 40-55, a member of that exiled Jewish community, declared that Cyrus, though a pagan (Isaiah 45:4b), was indeed the very anointed of the Lord (*meshixo*) to deliver Jacob from exile.

Psalm 96:1-9, (10-13)

Scholars like the Norwegian S. Mowinckel categorize this *hymn* as an *enthronement psalm* because of the reference to Yahweh reigning (*yhwh malax*, 96:10). Mowinckel believed such enthronement psalms belonged to a New Year's liturgy that enthroned Yahweh as king of Israel and, indeed, as king of the whole world.

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Founded in 312 BCE by Cassander, one of Alexander the Great's generals, Thessalonica (modern Thessaloniki) was in Paul's time the capital of Macedonia where Paul had established a major Christian community early in his travels. The occasion for this particular letter was the death of certain members of the Thessalonian community and the resulting loss of faith in what

the Thessalonian Christians believed was the promise of the Gospel that believers would be spared death until the coming of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). In the first part of the letter Paul encouraged his readers by complimenting their faithfulness and asking them to invest themselves in his ministry. As in the Pharisaic schools, the Thessalonian Christians were to perfect their Christian practice by imitation of their teacher Paul (1:6).

Matthew 22:15-22

Largely derived from Mark 12:13-17, this passage poses the vexing question as to whether Palestinian Jews ought to pay the hated census taxes or should enter into rebellion against Roman rule. The coin with the head of Caesar (Matthew 22:20-21) may have been the relatively common silver denarius with its inscription to Tiberias Caesar. Jesus' answer about rendering to Caesar what belongs to Caesar (22:21) reminded the reader that the coming kingdom of God will be radically discontinuous from the kingdoms of this world, including Caesar's empire. The answer also cleverly ducks the trap set for him by the Herodians and the students of the Pharisees (22:15-16) and is used to illustrate Jesus' great wisdom (22:22). Although the subject of much speculation, there is no good evidence for the identity of the "Herodians."

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