

Living the Word

Isaiah 45. 1-7

Cyrus, King of Persia launched a successful campaign against Babylonia, and he allowed the Jews resident there to return to Jerusalem. No doubt he had his own reasons for doing so. Viewing the event from the perspective of faith, Isaiah the prophet sees return of the Israelites from exile in Babylon to Jerusalem as sign of God's love for his chosen people. We discover that God is Lord over all peoples. He can use political rulers to accomplish his purpose even though they do not apparently acknowledge his ultimate authority. In last resort the empires of this world are under God's providence. This is reassuring for us when we see politicians misusing their position for personal gain. However St Paul in his letter to Timothy reminds us that arising from this we, the people of God, must pray regularly for our political leaders, that God's supreme will of justice and compassion for the weak will prevail in the face of political double dealing: "I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." (1 Timothy 2. 1-2)

Saints and Heroes

'Frideswide' is the name of a Saxon princess and healer who became the Patron Saint of Oxford. Her name means 'Peace' (*frithes*) 'Strong' (*withe*) and the legend associated with Frideswide certainly lives up to her name.

The story tells of Frideswide as a young woman, having become a nun and vowed chastity to Christ, being propositioned by King Algar of Leicester. The King was determined to marry her despite her refusals and she fled the city to avoid him. After a lengthy chase and Frideswide's increasingly desperate attempts to stay hidden from Algar, Frideswide prayed to God for protection and God struck the King blind. Finally understanding the wrongness of what he had done, the King asked Frideswide for forgiveness and she granted it, after which his sight was restored. Frideswide went on to have a reputation as a healer and a beloved figure of great piety and prayerfulness. Her feast day is 19th October.

From the Fathers

The root of all evil is covetousness. Many who have coveted riches have turned aside from the faith and encountered affliction. But I will encounter you, you who are truly poor, because although you were rich, for my sake you became poor. Lord, when I meditate on your poverty, whatever I may look at loses attraction for me. So give me something eternal, grant me a foretaste of eternity.

From, 'Sermons, 14, 7' by Augustine of Hippo, Bishop, 354-430.

Whose Side are You On?



The Pharisees openly try to trap Jesus, allying themselves for this purpose with the Herodians, with whom they would otherwise have strong disagreements. Should we pay taxes to Caesar, that is, to the Roman Emperor, they ask. The party of Herod, the puppet king, were in favour of Roman rule under which they exercised their own power. The Pharisees saw that as an abomination, and an offence against God. Jesus asks for a denarius, a small silver coin, sometimes translated as a penny. The coin bears the head of Caesar, together with his name. Although we cannot be sure which Caesar, the imprint of his name would include a claim to universal domination, and to a god-like status, unacceptable to many of his listeners, and unacceptable to Christians. Jesus evades the trap, and points us to a higher calling. The word translated as to pay, or to give back, is better read as to render, a much stronger term. What really matters is giving to God what truly and rightly belongs to God, our worship, and our very lives, in love and service through his body, the Church.

