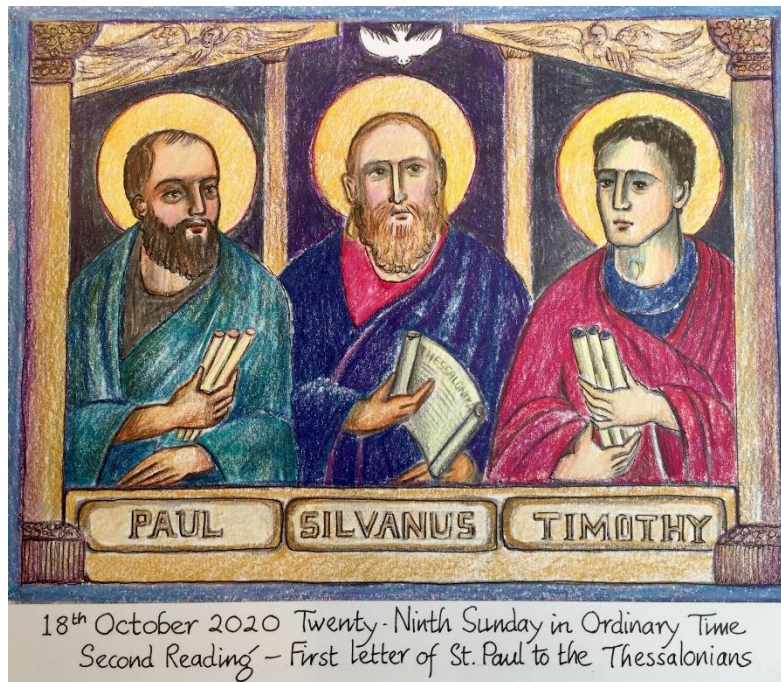


Homily for 18th Sunday of the Year.



Artwork by Moya Hogarth -

We are facing continuous uncertainty with the challenge to us of the Covid virus. In London we are restricted in our movements to tier two, others now in the third tier are facing even greater restrictions. We are all experiencing limitations on our ability to communicate with our family members. In the parish we need to be sensitive to the consequences of the virus on the lives of our elderly and house bound. There is no specific programme for the vulnerable this time round but for those who are quarantining themselves either because of a positive showing after a test or proximity to someone with a positive result there is need for the helping hand of a neighbour. The first time round many offered their help in supporting those who found it difficult to collect their groceries, or medicines. Others were supported by regular phone calls or e mails. Some even managed to conquer the complexity of Zoom exchanges. As the days go by there may be increasing need to offer help and support to those most seriously affected by the virus. I know the parish will respond generously to such needs when requested.

The gospel today touches on the needs to balance the demands of Christian living in an ever more complex society. Jesus is yet again challenged by the Pharisees, this time with the support of the Herodians. This is not just a word game between them, it is deadly serious. The trick question addressed to Jesus could be fatal. If he denies Caesars right to tax he would incur the hostility of the

Roman occupiers, If he agreed that the Torah supported the right of Rome to tax he would incur the wrath of the Jewish national extremists. Jesus reply to the challenge from the Pharisees and the Herodians both surprises and disconcerts his questioners.

Accepting the coin he is offered, which has Caesar's imprint on it, he points out that by using it they are already paying Caesar's tribute. But they also have to pay tribute to God, and the second part of Jesus' saying , 'give to God what belongs to God', is the more important for those who at worship in God's Temple are in debt to him. Jesus' careful response enables him to avoid the trap set for him. The words of Jesus are just as much directed to us in our present position. We need to get our priorities sorted out. The challenges of our time may make us get our priorities right. There is time when we can put the demands of God ahead of the demands of the material world. Jesus helps us see that it is God who has sovereign power over all in creation, and that he can bring about the fulfilment of the kingdom even at the expense of the civic authorities, as we see in the reading from Isaiah where he uses Cyrus to bring about the liberation of His People. As we read in Isaiah, "Though you do not know me I have armed you so that men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun that apart from me all is nothing". Or as we read in the psalm today, " Worship the Lord in his Temple. O earth tremble before him. Proclaim to the nations God is King. He will judge the people in fairness."

Canon John