

**Thanksgiving Day**  
**Cycle B**  
**Revised**

**Joel 2:11-27**

The book that bears his name places the southern prophet Joel in a time during an otherwise unattested locust plague in Palestine. Most commentators put the time of this prophecy in the post-exilic period (*i. e.* at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE) during which tiny Jerusalem struggled for survival. The prophet uses the plague of locusts as a figure for an expected invasion of the country by unnamed enemies, a punishment for Jerusalem's sin. In 2:1 the author uses the figure of the "day of the Lord" from Amos; but unlike Amos, our writer believes that Judah's repentance will bring salvation (12-17). The author uses language reminiscent of the Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40-55) to describe the renewed fortunes of the forgiven Jerusalem.

**Psalm 126**

Psalms 120-133 are each labeled "A Song of Ascents." songs pilgrims sang on the way to the temple in Jerusalem; but they are neither all of a single date nor all of a single genre. Psalm 126 is more like a *communal thanksgiving* than anything else; and there is general agreement that verses 1-4 refer to the return of exiles from Babylon in 539-538 BCE, thus making this a psalm of the second temple. Verses 5-7 petition for a return of the captives still in Babylon or a plea for the restoration of the fortunes of those who had returned to Zion only to find life there unexpectedly difficult. There is just enough controversy about the text and lexicography of verses 1 and 5 to cause this ambiguity in the meaning of the entire psalm. In verse 1, did the Lord "restore the fortunes of Zion" or "return the captives of Zion?" Or, indeed, as S. Terrien (2003) suggested, does verse 1 refer to the Lord's return from Zion's captivity? There are similar problems in verse 5.

**1 Timothy 2:1-7**

By the time the unknown writer had penned 1 Timothy in Paul's name during the first part of the second century CE, Christians had already come through sporadic and often intense local and regional persecutions. Nevertheless, the writer enjoins his readers to pray for those in authority, presumably including their persecutors. Christian Gnostics, on the other hand, against whom this epistle was directed, believed that the spiritually enlightened Christians ought to ignore this world, its rulers, and its tribulations entirely and concentrate only on the heavenly world. Christians of this Gnostic persuasion would have also found objectionable the claim in 1 Timothy 2:4 that God desires the salvation of all people through "knowledge" (*epignosis*) of the truth. If all people could have access to *gnosis* (or *epignosis*) and the salvation such knowledge brings, then the esoteric nature of Gnostic Christianity would immediately be compromised and its claims to authenticity seriously challenged.

**Matthew 6:25-33**

These sayings, also found in Luke 12:22-32, come from the so-called "Q" document the authors of the First and Third Gospels shared in composing their works. The demand for radical dependence on God's providence had always constituted an important feature of Jewish belief, as seen especially in the Sabbatical and Jubilee regulations of Deuteronomy 15 and Leviticus 25. Both of these codes require that Israel live for a time only on the food that grows naturally upon the land and depend utterly on God to supply their need. In the time of Jesus many Jews believed that the advent of the Messiah would occur during a last great Jubilee, the Sabbath of Sabbath years, and early Christians appear to have shared this view. Complete dependence on God to provide food and clothing, therefore, expresses this Jubilee expectation