

*in Rome itself where all terrible and repugnant things from all parts of the world come together and spread. ..(After the Christians' arrest).. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished; or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination when daylight had expired."*

In truth nobody knows who started the fire. The most plausible theory is that it started by accident like earlier fires. Most Christians lived on the other side of the River Tiber in Trastevere, south of the present-day Vatican. The area was one of the few out of reach of the flames. This made Christians easy suspects. To many the fact that the fire spared them was proof of culpability. The terrifying fire lasted several days. Day seemed to turn to night. Some theologians speculate that the Christians in Rome believed it was the beginning of the end, the second coming, and began to express if not joy, then a certain anticipation, no doubt in contradistinction to the rest of the city's population! From this, it was a short step for Nero to blame and kill them. The persecution died down after Nero's death in 68 AD until Domitian is said to have rekindled it in 90-96 AD.

(1) Peter Lampe (2003)

-Stephen. S

**Entrance antiphon: God is in his holy place, God who unites those who dwell in his house; he himself gives might and strength to his people.**

**First Reading: 1 Kings 3: 5, 7-12**

**Responsorial Psalm: 118. Response: Lord, how I love your law!**

**Second Reading: Romans 8: 28-30**

**Gospel Acclamation: Alleluia, alleluia! I call you friends, says the Lord, because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father. Alleluia!**

**Gospel: Matthew: 13: 44-52**

**Memorial Acclamation: Save us, Saviour of the world, for by your Cross and Resurrection you have set us free.**

**Communion Antiphon: Bless the Lord, O my soul, and never forget all his benefits.**



## Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

### Cycle A, 2023 Weekly Reflection: Christians and Romans: (2) Early Roman Christians and the Great Fire (64

**AD)** The word 'Christian', probably invented by the Roman authorities at Antioch in the late 30s AD, was not intended as a flattering term. What did the Romans think was remarkable about Christians such that they needed special designation? Perhaps they were aware that the Greek 'Christos' translated the Jewish word 'Messiah'? If so, Romans would associate Christians with the Messianic Jewish movement, hostile to Roman power. In any event, the Romans sensed that something subversive was afoot. The early Christians spoke of the imminent Kingdom of God which would sweep away the Roman Empire and bring about the end of time - and the last judgment. In "Christians at Rome in the first two Centuries" (1) we are told that the beginnings of Christianity in Rome are shrouded in mystery. In the late 40s AD the edict of Claudius expelled Jews from Rome and these Jews included Jewish Christians. The expulsion appears to have followed trouble in the synagogues between traditional Jews and Jewish Christians. In Acts 18:2 when Paul arrived at Corinth "... he found a Jew named Aquila.... lately come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome." However, some Christians either remained or returned to Rome. In the late-50s St Paul wrote to the Romans (15:23) saying that he had "longed for many years to come to you". Hostility to Christians continued and reached a climax in 64 AD when the Emperor Nero was suspected of having started the great fire of Rome in order to clear part of the city for his new palace project. Tacitus' Annals explains the reasons for this hostility and for the first major persecution of Christians:

*"In order to dispel the rumour, Nero shifted the blame to others and imposed the most cruel punishments upon people despised for their vices whom the populace called Christians. The name is derived from Christus, who had been executed by the procurator Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius. This execrable superstition was at first suppressed and stamped on and then reappeared not only in Judea which is the source of this malady but*