

Imaginary First-Century Letters

Select representatives from your group to read the two letters, and then discuss the two questions at the end.

Dear Uncle Thomas,

Peace to you! I wish I had good news, but the situation here has grown worse for Christians. It recalls the days when Emperor Nero blamed Christians for the burning of Rome and had us killed for sport in the Coliseum. Emperor Domitian is trying to unify his kingdom by forcing one religion on all, one that worships him as a god! Everyone is to declare, "Caesar is god" and burn incense before his statue. Almost all meat has been sacrificed to idols, which means eating it is being unfaithful to our one true God.

Then there's the daily hardship of being different from our neighbors in the Roman Empire. They regard us almost as atheists because we worship only one God. And they view our Eucharist as cannibalism. It doesn't help that Jesus, our leader, was executed as a rebel. Some people, like the Nicolaitians, teach that we should compromise and go along with the culture. That way our lives will be spared or at least made easier. What do you think? Although it's hard to be a Christian, I'm eternally grateful to you for sharing this faith with me. Please pray for my family and me that we can endure this suffering.

Sincerely in Christ,

Samuel

Dear Samuel,

Peace and grace to you! Your dangerous situation reminds me of two events in history. First, in 586 BC, Babylon totally destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple and captured our ancestors. They were exiled for years in Babylon and mourned the loss of their Promised Land and the Temple where God was present. Second, remember how in 167 BC, when the Greeks ruled Israel, Emperor Antiochus IV called himself Epiphanes ("God manifest")? He ordered everyone to worship him and forbade the practice of the Jewish faith. He even profaned the Temple by sacrificing a pig to Zeus in it, which was an abomination! After three and a half years of suffering, the Jewish people, led by the Maccabees, overthrew this rule.

Both times People clung to their faith in the one God and eventually were saved. By all means, do not give in to the pressure to conform and betray your faith. Be strong like God's people in the past. Be assured of my prayers for you and your family that you may have the grace to be faithful. God will bless you.

Peace in Christ,

Uncle Thomas

1. In what ways are Catholics called to be countercultural today?
2. How can we find support to stay faithful to the teachings of Jesus?

