

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT - A

On this second Sunday we have the message of John the Baptist telling us to 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.' In Matthew's account John encouraged the people to repent not only by his words but also by his example of living very sparsely. He says it is no good looking to our heritage we will be judged by producing 'the appropriate fruit.' We must so conduct our lives that when God clears 'his threshing floor' we will be among the wheat which he will gather into his barn. The first reading from Isaiah corroborates Matthew's teaching, we hear about a new 'shoot' springing from David's family. He will be someone who has wisdom who will judge with integrity and usher in a time of everlasting peace. He will be someone to be sought out by all nations. The second reading continues the thought expressed in the first reading we must find hope in the scriptures because in hope we will find help from God enabling us to follow 'the example of Christ Jesus' who is 'the shoot that springs from the stock of Jesse.'

The **First Reading** comes from the prophet Isaiah, the first part of the book, chs.1-39. Isaiah was born about 765 BC and received his prophetic vocation in the Temple in Jerusalem. His mission was to proclaim the fall of Israel and Judah as punishment for the nation's infidelity. He exercised his ministry for forty years and proclaimed his teaching in four distinct periods. It seems Isaiah finished his teaching by 700, after which date we know nothing of the prophet. There is a tradition that his life ended in martyrdom. His writings show Isaiah to be a poet of genius. The revelation of the transcendence of God and of human unworthiness he received in the Temple at the time of his call left a lasting mark on the prophet. For Isaiah God is an awesome God who is Holy, Strong, the Mighty One the King. We are his creatures defiled by sin for which God demands reparation insisting on just living among his people and sincerity in divine worship. Isaiah is the prophet of faith, he insists the people should trust in God in times of national crisis, by this alone will salvation be attained. Isaiah's hope is that a remnant of the people will recognise the Messiah for its King. This Messiah is to be a descendant of David. A prophet of considerable standing, Isaiah gathered round him a school of disciples who preserved his teaching.

The reading, 11.1-10, is from the Book of Immanuel, chs.6-12. At the beginning of the book Isaiah receives his call which prepares him for his work during the Syro-Ephraimite war. Our reading is a messianic poem which describes the characteristics of the coming Messiah: he will be of Davidic stock and filled with the spirit of the prophets, he will establish in society that 'integrity' which is the reflection of God's sanctity on earth, he will restore the peace of Eden seen in peace between the animals that is the harmony between humanity and nature a harmony which was broken by humanity's rebellion (Genesis 3). Here the messianic age symbolically described as a return to the peace of Eden.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 71.1-2,7-8,12-13,17, evokes an image of the future ideal king which Christian tradition sees as a portrait of the messianic King foretold by Isaiah. In the first verse the king receives God's ability to judge with justice, in the second the 'uprightness' of the messianic age will last forever. The third verse shows his characteristic compassion for the poor and the final verse ends with praise of him through whom all nations will be blessed.

The **Second Reading** is from Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome. Paul had not founded the Church in Rome but he intended to visit the Christians there on his way to Spain. This huge letter, with much detailed teaching, is difficult to summarize. The community in Rome was a mixture of Jewish and non-Jewish converts and there was a danger that they would look down on each other. Some of the converts from Judaism wanted pagan converts to be circumcised to ensure their salvation. Paul maintained this made nonsense of Christ's redemptive work. The Law was good and holy but made those who kept the Law aware of their need of God's help. This help has now been given in Christ Jesus which is explained in some detail.

The reading, 15.4-9, is from Paul's exhortation at the end of his letter. He has just asked that that 'they bear with the susceptibilities of the weaker ones...each must consider his neighbour's good so support one another. Christ did not indulge his own feelings because as scripture says: *The insults of those who insult you fall on me*' the reading follows. Referring to the scriptures written long ago Paul says they are meant to teach us hope and those 'who did not give up were helped by God.' Paul hopes that this help from God will enable us 'to be tolerant with each other following the example of Christ Jesus' and so give glory to God. Being friendly to each other gives glory to God, and the reason Christ became a servant to the Jewish people was not only to fulfil God's promises but also to bring non-Jewish people to praise God. A lesson for us all in Advent to be tolerant with each other following Jesus' example and we will give praise to God.