

## THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT - B

The gospel reading for this second Sunday gives us instruction on preparing for the first coming of Christ. We have the words of John the Baptist, 'I have baptised you with water, but he (i.e. the Christ) will baptise you with the Holy Spirit', a very different and a complete baptism. In the first reading we continue with the prophet Isaiah this Sunday from the beginning of the second part of the prophecy. The opening words give the key to the reading, the consolation of God for his people in exile will be revealed. In the second reading St Peter is encouraging us saying, 'what holy and saintly lives you should be living while you wait for the Day of God to come.'

The **First Reading** comes from the prophet Isaiah. He was a major prophet in Israel but the book which bears his name is not all his work. The reading today comes from the second part of the book, chs.40-55 (Second Isaiah), which deals with a period of Jewish history 200 years after Isaiah's day when Jerusalem has fallen and the nation is in exile in Babylon. Cyrus, the instrument of God, is about to come and overpower the Babylonian Empire and be the means by which the Israelites are able to return, a new Exodus. Embedded in the book are four passages called the 'Songs of the Servant of Yahweh.' They depict a perfect servant of God who is the light of the nations and gathers in God's people. He is one who preaches the true faith who expiates people's sins by his own death and is glorified by God. This part of the book, in contrast with the first part which is for the most part threatening, is far more consoling as the opening words announce: "'Console my people, console them,' says your God."

The reading, 40.1-5,9-11, contains the promise of a new exodus under God's leadership because for Israel in exile 'her time of service is ended,...her sin is atoned for' so the Lord is now going to make it possible for Israel to return to her own country. So the messenger tells the Israelites to get ready for a highway will be made ready for them to make their way home. The messenger must shout the good news that God is here to lead them home like a shepherd leading his flock. Just as God led the Israelites out of Egypt across the desert to the Promised Land so now God will bring his people home 'with power, subduing all things under him.' As we prepare for the coming of Christ this reading prefigures what God will do for us when he comes again to lead us to our heavenly home.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 84.9-14, is a psalm for peace and justice in which the returning exiles are promised the peace of the messianic age foretold by Isaiah. For the returned exiles God will speak of peace and 'his glory will dwell in our land' that is the glory which had deserted the Temple and the holy city will return when the Temple is restored. In the second verse the attributes of God his mercy and faithfulness, his justice and peace are personified and will inaugurate the kingdom of God on earth and in human hearts. In the final verse God's saving justice goes before us bringing peace and happiness.

The **Second Reading** is from the second letter of Peter. The authorship of the letter like the first is questioned even though Peter is named in the opening address but the letter is accepted by the Church as canonical and Christians accept the letter as an authoritative document from the apostolic age. The purpose of the letter is twofold: to warn against false teachers, ch.2, and to allay anxiety due to the delay on the *parousia*, the second coming of Christ, at the end of time, ch.3. The doctrine the letter teaches supports the vocation of all Christians to the 'share in the divine nature', 1.4; the way scriptural inspiration is defined, 1.20f; the assurance that the *parousia* will come though no one can know when; the prediction of a new world free of all injustice after the old world has been destroyed by fire, 3.3-13.

The reading, 3.8-14, is from the section of the letter which deals with the 'the Day of the Lord.' That it will come is certain, it is the timing which is uncertain. There may appear to be a delay on the part of the Lord 'as some people think; rather is he being patient with you wanting nobody to be lost and everybody brought to repentance.' Scripture teaches 'the Day of the Lord will come like a thief' unexpectedly and while Peter describes the portents which will accompany his coming, the main teaching is, 'while you are waiting, do your best to live blameless and unsullied lives so that he will find you at peace.' These words of course can apply as a preparation for death as well as for the *parousia*.