

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT – B

On this third Sunday we listen to the gospel according to John where he gives his account of Jesus entering the Temple and driving out those selling sheep, cattle and pigeons and up-turning the tables of the money changers. The Jews want a sign to justify Jesus' behaviour and Jesus says, 'Destroy this sanctuary and in three days I will raise it up.' John explains that Jesus was speaking of the sanctuary which was his body. Jesus was teaching that Temple sacrifice would come to an end with his death and that future sacrifice would be conducted in the temple which is his body. In the first reading we have the core summary of the Jewish Law the Ten Commandments. In the second reading Paul explains that preaching Christ crucified seems like sheer madness to the Jews and Greeks but for those whom God has called the crucified Christ 'is the power and wisdom of God.'

The **First Reading** is from the book of Exodus, the second book in the Bible and the second book of the Law. This book has two main themes: the birth and call of Moses and the deliverance of the Israelite people from Egypt and then the Covenant God made with the Israelites at Mt Sinai through Moses, the two are connected by the journey through the desert. Like the book of Genesis, Exodus is a compilation of three earlier documents and our reading today comes from the Elohist tradition from the use of Elohim, to designate God, by the author. This tradition maintains the distance separating human beings from God.

The reading, 20.1-17, is the list of the ten words or commandments. In its original form it may go back to Moses consisting of ten short rhythmical statements to assist learning by heart, later some were elaborated. The Ten Commandments cover worship, ethics and life and are essential for the Israelites in order that they become a people, a nation, a people without a common rule of law cannot live. We must notice the Ten Commandments legislate about our relationship with God first then our neighbour and lastly our possessions. We should not view the commandments as negative. The Promised Land to which the Israelites were journeying was to be a place for the worship of the true God. Mere possession of the land, mere national autonomy, would have reduced Israel to the level of all other nations. The teaching of the Decalogue must not be seen as belonging solely to the Old Testament, Jesus taught the Commandments in the gospels.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 18.8-11, is a psalm of praise to God, the sun of saving justice. It is a hymn which celebrates God as Creator of the heavens particularly the sun (vv.5-6) and as author of the Law, both the sun and the Law show forth the perfection of God. In the east the sun symbolised justice hence the mention of both sun and law in this psalm. The verses we read/sing today clearly refer to the Law and can be prayed as a reflection on the commandments given in the first reading.

The Second Reading is from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Paul evangelised the church at Corinth between A.D. 50 and 52. His policy was to establish the Christian faith in a centre of population, and here he chose the great and populous port of Corinth, so that the faith could spread to the whole of the province of Achaia. The Christian community grew strong composed mainly of poor people, but Corinth was a centre of Greek life, philosophy and religions. It was also a notorious centre of immorality which was to cause problems for the newly converted. In 1 Corinthians Paul addresses urgent problems that faced the church there and the decisions that had to be made to address these problems such as moral conduct, marriage and virginity, liturgical and Eucharistic meetings, charisms, matters concerning the Church and the world, appeals to civil courts, eating foods sacrificed to idols. Paul's religious genius enabled him to turn all these problems into a vehicle for the profound doctrine of Christian liberty, the sanctification of the body, the supremacy of love, union with Christ. Paul teaches the Corinthians that there is only one master, Christ, and only one message, the cross which is the one true wisdom.

The reading, 1.22-25, comes at the beginning of the letter. There were serious divisions among the Corinthians some were saying they belong to Paul, others to Apollos, others to Cephas or even some to Christ. Paul asks in whose name were they baptised. Then Paul says he was not sent to baptise but to preach the gospel and for some the message of Christ's cross is folly but for those who have been called the cross is the power of God. 'God has shown up human wisdom as folly' because human wisdom was unable to recognise God. Then the reading begins: 'While the Jews demand miracles and the Greeks look for wisdom' people are being saved 'through the folly of the gospel.' For the Jews the gospel is an obstacle for the gentiles it is foolishness 'but to those who have been called, whether they are Jews or Greeks, a Christ who is both the power of God and the wisdom of God.' God's folly and weakness are wiser and stronger than human wisdom and strength. (It is human to want proof whether through miracles or logical argument and this is not reprehensible but it is unacceptable if it becomes a condition without which the mind refuses to believe.) It is with such thoughts that we make our journey through Lent to the celebration of Good Friday and Easter Sunday. If you have time read from 1Cor.1.10 down to the end of the chapter it will help you to get into Paul's argument.