

## THE SECOND SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - A

On this Sunday following his baptism we think about Jesus beginning his public ministry as the words of the response to the psalm say: 'Here I am, Lord! I am come to do your will.' Although we are reading the gospel story according to Matthew this year we listen this Sunday to John's unique account of John the Baptist's witness to Jesus, he is 'the lamb of God' on whom 'I saw the Spirit coming down...he is the Chosen One of God.' In the first reading from Isaiah the work of the prophet is set down, God's servant, he will be a 'light to the nations,' words which in the light of the gospel reading we apply to Jesus beginning his ministry on earth. The second reading is the opening address from Paul's first letter to the Christians of Corinth.

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), the work of an unnamed writer, a disciple of Isaiah. This part of the book covers 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 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, 49.3,5-6, is from the second song of the servant and takes the same theme as the first song to which we listened in last Sunday's first reading. Israel, the servant of the Lord in whom God will be glorified seems to be an individual formed in the womb to be his servant, to restore Jacob and all Israel to God and to be honoured and strengthened in God's eyes. The servant is then told that restoring Israel is not enough, he is to be a light to the nations so that God's salvation reaches to the ends of the earth. These words are applied by the Church to Jesus' mission and we are reminded of the command to the disciples at the end of Matthew's gospel: 'Go, therefore make disciples of all nations.'

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 39.2,4,7-10, is in two parts, the first eleven verses are a hymn of thanksgiving which is followed by a cry of distress. We are using the first part which begins with God's help setting us on a sure path. In the second verse the wish of God is not for a sin offering instead God gives 'an open ear' which is capable of hearing and knowing God's will. In the third verse we learn that fulfilling God's will is more important than sacrifice. Finally God's justice is proclaimed to all the assembled brethren.

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 use all these problems as a vehicle to expound the profound doctrines 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 only true wisdom.

The reading, 1.1-3, is the opening address and greeting at the beginning of the letter and we will be reading extracts from this letter until the beginning of Lent. Paul, as was customary, says who is sending the letter and to whom it is being addressed, to the Corinthians 'to those who have been consecrated in Christ Jesus and called to be God's holy people' Paul then adds, 'with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord as well as ours,' we can say therefore that Paul is writing to us today as well as to the Corinthians of his day. He refers to the Corinthians and by association us as well as: 'consecrated in Christ Jesus and called to be God's holy people,' this, as a result of our baptism, is our vocation. Paul concludes his greeting with a prayer for grace and peace 'from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.'