

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – A

This Sunday's gospel reading continues with the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus' teaching about love of neighbour which includes your enemy who is also your neighbour and needs your love. In the first reading the Israelites are commanded to be holy and this involves loving your brother. The second reading continues with the letter to the Corinthians and Paul tells them they are the temple of the Holy Spirit and the wisdom they must seek is not the wisdom of this world because they 'belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God.'

The **First Reading** is from the book of Leviticus the third book of the Jewish Law after Genesis and Exodus. The book does not continue the narrative of Genesis and Exodus but is a code of laws which began to be collected in Jerusalem shortly before and during the Exile but did not reach its final form until after the Exile, i.e. after 538 BC yet it contains laws of great antiquity going back to the nomadic times. Leviticus was placed in the Pentateuch later by Priestly editors. The book can be divided into four sections: the ritual of sacrifice, 1-7; the investiture of priests, 8-10; the rules concerning clean and unclean, 11-16; the law of holiness 17-26; and an appendix, 27.

The reading, 19.1-2,17-18, comes from the law of holiness. It begins with a statement: "Be holy, for I, Yahweh your God am holy." The practical consequences of this are set out in the second part of the reading: 'You will not harbour hatred for your brother. You will reprove your fellow-countryman firmly...You will not exact vengeance on or bear any sort of grudge against any members of your race but will love your neighbour as yourself.' It is clear that this teaching does not go as far as loving your enemy which is Jesus' teaching in the gospel reading. Jesus came to fulfil the Law.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 102. 1-4,8,10,12-13, is a psalm which proclaims that God is love and the way in which that love expresses itself is in acts of kindness towards us: he forgives offences; cures disease; redeems us; he is slow to anger; rich in mercy.....We are called to live in this manner because as the first reading proclaims we must be holy as God is holy.

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 1Corinthians 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, of marriage and virginity, of liturgical and Eucharistic meetings, of charisms, of 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, 3.16-23, comes at the end of the section where Paul has been dealing with divisions and scandals within the Corinthian community. Paul teaches that they are the temple of the Holy Spirit i.e. the Holy Spirit is living within them so divisions have no place in the life of the community. Paul brings his teaching on this point to a conclusion by saying that anybody who thinks he is wise according to the ideas of the world 'must learn to be a fool before he really can be wise.' The reason is that earthly wisdom is foolishness before God who knows men's thoughts 'so there is nothing to boast about in anything human: Paul, Apollos, Cephas, (these are the factions mentioned in 1.12) the world, life and death, the present and the future are your servants; but you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God.' Our life in Christ is a very important teaching for Paul.