

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – B

The gospel reading is Mark's account of Jesus healing the paralytic and how the scribes criticised Jesus because he forgave the man his sins but then Jesus uses his miraculous powers 'to prove...that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins' and all who saw 'praised God saying, "We have never seen anything like this."' What is Jesus teaching through these miraculous signs? In the first reading Isaiah, in figurative language, speaks of Jesus' mission to make a new pathway for everyone with their sins forgiven. In the second reading Paul says Jesus always said 'Yes' to the Father's wishes and we can say 'Amen to the praise of God.' We are reminded that as Christ was anointed with the Spirit we are marked 'with his seal.'

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. 43.18-19,21-22,24-25, begins with God telling the Israelites still in bondage in Babylon that there is no need to recall past events such as the crossing of the Red Sea and the destruction of the Egyptian army, these wonders will be eclipsed by even greater wonders which God is about to perform in the new Exodus when God will lead the Israelites back from Babylon to their homeland and the people will sing God's praises. The reading now takes on a different tone, Jacob, the Israelites, 'have not troubled' themselves on God's behalf rather they have burdened God with their iniquities, have made God their servant and wearied him with their sins but God will forgive if Israel admits its wrong-doing. This picture is repeated in Jesus' day and the gospel reading shows this.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 40.2-5,13-14, is a prayer of a sufferer deserted. Sickness in the psalm is regarded as a punishment for sin. In the consequences of our sinfulness we turn in confidence to the Lord for healing.

The **Second Reading** is from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. Paul evangelized the Church at Corinth between 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 2 Corinthians Paul is able to say that the abuses dealt with in his earlier letter had been corrected. In the first, main part of the letter he writes magnificently about the dignity of the apostle's mission. Chapters 8-9 deal with collecting money which he illuminates with the ideal of union between the churches. The final section is in the form of an apology when he is accused of weakness and ambition.

The reading, 1.18-22, begins with Paul saying quite clearly that God's message is faithful, seen in his firmness to carry out his plan of mercy and salvation through Christ Jesus; it was never 'Yes-and-No;' his nature is always 'Yes.' Paul wants the Corinthians to be assured of the message he preaches because it is from Christ Jesus and not his own wishes 'that we answer Amen to the praise of God.' God gives us and you as well 'a sure place in Christ' and just as Christ was anointed with the Spirit at his baptism we too were similarly anointed with the Spirit and this is God's pledge, 'the Spirit which we carry in our hearts.' Paul wishes the Corinthians to be quite certain about the faith through which they live their lives.