

THE EIGHTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – C

The gospel reading continues with Jesus' teaching found in Luke's version of the sermon following the Beatitudes. The teaching deals with integrity, integrity of the heart. We must rid ourselves of our internal blindness first before we pass judgements about other people. We must have a sound heart and mind to produce good fruit. The first reading tells us a man is tested by the words that come from his mouth. In the second reading we continue with Paul's teaching on the resurrection. When our perishable nature is clothed in imperishability then death is conquered forever.

The **First Reading** is from the book of Ecclesiasticus, one of the Wisdom books found in the Bible. Written originally in Hebrew and then translated into Greek, it is the Greek text which is recognised by the Church as part of the Canon of Scripture. The subscription at the end of the book reads, "Wisdom of Jesus, son of (Ben) Sira" 51.30. At the beginning of the book is a foreward written by the translator, the grandson of Ben Sira, who translated the book into Greek when he went to settle in Egypt c.132 BC. At the time of writing Palestine was under the dominion of the Seleucids, Greek kings, who imposed a Greek way of life, Hellenisation, on the people. It was against these dangerous innovations that Ben Sira wrote to defend the traditions of Israel. He was a scribe who sought both wisdom and respect for the Law. He had a high regard for the Temple, its liturgy and the priestly office. His thought was nourished by reading the sacred books of Israel, especially the Prophets and Wisdom literature. The form of the book resembles previous wisdom books, lacking any apparent order, but it is traditional in that Wisdom which comes from God is rooted in the fear of the Lord, bringing happiness in its wake. The book's original contribution is in identifying Wisdom with the Law of Moses. Ben Sira meditates on the history of salvation reviewing the great personalities throughout the OT. All the kings of Judah and Israel are variously condemned except David, Hezekiah and Josiah, even Solomon receives a severe verdict, yet, Ben Sira is proud of his people's past, the great figures of history and the wonders God worked through them. He gives prominence to the doctrine of the covenant, the promises God made to his people but does not look forward to the coming of a messiah to deliver his people this will come from fidelity to the Law. In the meantime he accepts his people's situation under Greek domination with humility and peace. The reading, 27.2-4, teaches that the words spoken by a man reveals his defects as Jesus taught, 'it is what comes out of the mouth that makes someone unclean.' As a sieve gathers the rubbish, the kiln tests the potter's work, the orchard reveals the quality of the fruit, it is the words spoken that test a man.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 91.1-2,13-16, is a song of the upright, of God's protection of the upright. Although they receive God's protection the upright will be tested but God will deliver them.

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 one true wisdom.

The reading, 15.54-58, continues Paul's teaching about the resurrection. We live in a perishable body but when it assumes imperishability, 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' The victory is over the power of sin which Christ conquered when he died and rose again showing that death had no more power over him and in him we too will gain victory over sin.