

## THE EIGHTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - A

On this eighth Sunday the Church continuing with Matthew's Sermon on the Mount is really asking us, what are our priorities? Jesus teaches quite clearly what we should be: 'Set your hearts on his kingdom first, and on his righteousness, and all these things will be given you as well.' In the first reading Isaiah tells us that God will never abandon us and in the second reading Paul teaches the Corinthians they are stewards of God entrusted with the mysteries of God and he will decide when he comes how we have acquitted ourselves.

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, 49.14-15, is taken from the section headed 'the joyful homecoming' and speaks of the Israelites returning joyfully to their homeland from exile in Babylon and for a moment the writer inserts the thoughts they had before there was any hope of a return. So the reading begins: 'Zion was saying....' but the Lord is quick to respond saying even if a mother could forget her child 'I shall not forget you.' Yahweh's everlasting love for his people is variously described in scripture; like the love of a father for his children, like the love of a husband for his wife, and here like the love of a mother for her child. When the gospel reading tells us, 'That is why I am telling you not to worry....' we know God's love for us is written large across the scriptures.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 61.2-3,6-9, is a prayer placing our hope in God alone. My help comes from him because he is like a rock, my stronghold and these thoughts are repeated in each verse.

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, 4.1-5, is part of the conclusion to the first section of the letter in which Paul deals with the scandals and divisions in the community. He teaches them they are stewards of Christ's mysteries and stewards should be found worthy of God's trust. Paul tells them he is not troubled by the thought that they or some human tribunal might find him worthy or not because the Lord is the judge to whom Paul will listen. He does not even allow his own conscience to acquit him, no there must be no premature judgement everyone must wait until the Lord comes and he will bring into the light everything that has not been seen and each of us will be praised by God accordingly.