

THE TENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - C

We reached the fifth Sunday of the Year before Lent began we now resume the Sundays of the year with the tenth Sunday. In the gospel reading Jesus visits a town called Nain where Luke describes Jesus' compassion for a widow who has just lost her only son and not only her son because she now has no means of livelihood. In the first lesson we have a similar story and like Jesus Elijah restores to a mother her dead son, alive and well. The second reading is the beginning of Paul's apologia in which he makes clear to the Galatians that the gospel message he preached was 'learnt only through a revelation of Jesus Christ.' He then describes his journey of faith until he goes up to Jerusalem to meet with Cephas, the apostle Peter.

The **First Reading** is from the first book of Kings, one of the historical books of the Bible. Books 1 and 2 Kings are a continuation from books 1 and 2 Samuel, indeed the first two chapters of 1 Kings which deal with the death of king David, are the concluding chapters of 2 Samuel 9-20. The two books of Kings deal with the reign of Solomon, 1 Kings 3-11, his wisdom, his riches, his building programme including the Temple. It was an age of peace but also of exploitation which aggravated the existing hostility between Judah, in the south, and the northern tribes, Israel. On Solomon's death his kingdom split in two and to the political secession of the northern tribes was added religious schism. This was a period of fraternal strife and attacks from outside; Egypt attacked Judah and the Aramaeans (Syria) attacked the northern tribes. This was only a prelude to the fall of Samaria, capital of the North, to the Assyrians in 721 and the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonian king in 587, followed by Exile. Woven in among these accounts are the Elijah and Elisha cycles, the two great prophets of the period who had much to say about the religious conduct of the kings of the North. After the political division the kings of Israel are all judged guilty of abandoning Temple sacrifice and erecting a shrine of their own at Bethel, and only two kings of Judah receive fulsome praise. All this ran contrary to the teaching of Deuteronomy that the Temple alone was the place for sacrifice and that the nation will be blessed only if it respects God's covenant and it will be punished if it does not.

The reading, 17.17-24, comes from the Elijah cycle (chaps.17-19) and is the story, like the gospel reading, of a widow's son raised to life. The son dies and the woman believes the 'man of God' will expose her misdeeds which she believes have led to the death of her son and she expresses her thoughts to Elijah but the man of God has come to do the work of God which is not to condemn a sinner but to restore life and enable faith and hope. We have the story of the child being restored to life and like Jesus in the gospel reading Elijah 'gave him to his mother.' The woman in gratitude expresses her faith in the man of God and the word that comes from his mouth. Two lives have been restored.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 29.2,4-6,11-13, reflecting the first reading, is a psalm of thanksgiving after facing deadly danger. The first verse could be the prayer of the mother in the first or gospel reading. No matter what afflicts us we should as in verse two praise God's holy name because when we cannot see God's way all seems dark but God does bring us into the light of his way. The psalm ends with a confident prayer and we thank God for ever.

The **Second Reading** is from Paul's letter to the Galatians. This letter is closely associated with the letter to the Romans because both letters deal with the same problem, the relationship between emerging Christianity and Judaism. Paul wastes no time in getting to the point, there is not the usual greeting instead he accuses the Galatians of 'going over to a different gospel', different that is from the one he preached. He then sets out his credentials proving his preaching is the truth. Paul is clearly very frustrated addressing the Galatians: 'You stupid people in Galatia!' By wishing to retain the practice of the Law they remain under guard by the Law like a slave; but now faith has come they are baptised, clothed in Christ, children of God and coheirs with Christ. The letter concludes with an exhortation to leave the Law behind and be led by the Spirit in confident hope. They were called to be free and should use their freedom, not for self-indulgence but to fulfill the law of love. Paul ends by saying: 'After this, let no one trouble me.'

The reading, 1.11-19, from the opening of the letter, is part of Paul's apologia. He makes it clear that the Good News he preaches is not a human message but 'something I learnt only through a revelation of Jesus Christ.' He then relates how he used to persecute the Church, but now realises that God had chosen him while still in his mother's womb to be his instrument to bring the gospel message to the pagans. After being called by God he says he did not go up to Jerusalem i.e. to see the Church leaders but spent time in 'Arabia' escaping from his new enemies and after three years went to Jerusalem to visit Cephas (Peter) no doubt to present his credentials since he had been well known as a leading persecutor of the Church. In line with the other two readings this reading may be seen as Saul being brought back to life and receiving a new name.