

THE NINTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – A

In the gospel reading we listen to Jesus teaching his disciples saying that his words must be listened to and action must follow then they will be like a sensible man who built his house on rock so that it could withstand the storm. In the first reading Moses tells the Israelites to fasten the words he speaks to their very being and obey them, then they will be a blessing if not his words will be a curse. In the second reading Paul is trying to teach that faith in Jesus will gain God's justice for both Jew and pagan not abiding by the precepts of the Law.

The **First Reading** is from the fifth book of the Law, the book of Deuteronomy. This book as the name suggests is a second law book and is distinct from the other four books of the Law in that, apart from chapters 31 and 34, it comes from a single written tradition: the Deuteronomic. This tradition has a distinctive style and its teaching constantly reaffirms that of all nations in the world, God has, out of pure love, chosen Israel to be his people, but this choice and the Covenant made with his people ratifying this choice are conditional on Israel giving allegiance exclusively to God, and to the prescribed worship to be offered to God in one single place of worship. The book is a code of civil and religious laws which are framed within a long discourse of Moses. The concluding chapters deal with the final days of Moses, the commissioning of Joshua to succeed Moses and Moses' death in sight of the Promised Land. The Deuteronomic code is a partial restatement of the laws promulgated in the desert and recalls the great events of Exodus, of Sinai and of the beginnings of the conquest of the Promised Land. Later the principles of Moses were re-thought by the prophets and adapted to the situation of the Israelites living in Palestine 600 years after Moses. After the fall of Samaria, 721, the book was stored away in the Temple in Jerusalem to be rediscovered in the reign of Josiah, 622. It was re-edited at the beginning of the Exile 587 and came to be regarded as a code of law laid down in his final years by Moses in Moab.

The reading, 11.18,26-28,32, is from the conclusion to second discourse of Moses. The opening sentence tells the Israelites to make Moses words part of themselves. 'Fasten them on your head...and on your forehead' led to wearing of *phylacteries* or *tephillin* or prayers by devout Jews, a literal fulfilment of Moses words. Then Moses tells the people 'if you obey the commandments of the Lord our God that I enjoin on you today' they will receive a blessing if not they will receive a curse. They must listen to and obey God's word.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 30.2-4,17,25, is a prayer in time of ordeal. With reference to the first reading the trials we face in keeping God's word in every aspect of our lives makes this psalm a wonderful prayer.

The **Second Reading** is from Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome. Paul had not founded the Church in Rome but he intended to visit the Christians there on his way to Spain. This huge letter, with much detailed teaching, is difficult to summarize. The community in Rome was a mixture of Jewish and non-Jewish converts and there was a danger that they would look down on each other. Some of the converts from Judaism wanted pagan converts to be circumcised to ensure their salvation. Paul maintained this made nonsense of Christ's redemptive work. The Law was good and holy but made those who kept the Law aware of their need of God's help. This help has now been given in Christ Jesus which is explained in some detail.

The reading, 3.21-25,28, comes from the second section of the letter and deals with the revelation of God's judgement. Paul teaches that in the past 'God's saving justice was witnessed by the Law and the Prophets' but now 'God's saving justice (is) given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.' Paul is at pains to explain to the Jewish converts in Rome that both Jew and pagan 'forfeited God's glory' by sinning but now 'both are justified through the free gift of his grace.' God appointed his Son Jesus 'to sacrifice his life so as to win reconciliation through faith' in Christ Jesus 'not by doing something the Law tells him to do.' Faith in Christ Jesus is more important than living by the Law.