

## THE TENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – A

In the gospel reading Jesus is criticised by the Pharisees for eating with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus admits that tax collectors and sinners are spiritually unhealthy and therefore need a doctor and he tells the Pharisees, quoting the prophet Hosea, 'Mercy is what pleases me not sacrifice.' For the Pharisees all such sinners would be drummed out of court. The first reading begins with an exhortation to know God then God speaks saying our love for him disappears as quickly as the morning dew on the grass. Hosea speaks of the punishments inflicted by God as a result and then that God desires 'love not sacrifice.' In the second reading Paul explains how Abraham's faith 'was reckoned to him as uprightness' and teaches us that just as Abraham's faith was 'reckoned' our faith too in the risen Lord 'will be "reckoned"'

The **First Reading** is from the Prophet Hosea who was a native of the Northern Kingdom and a contemporary of Amos. His ministry began in the reign of Jeroboam II (783-743) but he did not live to see the fall of Samaria to the Assyrians in 721. The painful experiences of his own married life were to condition his ministry. He loves his wife but she deserts him; his love remains, however, and, having put her to the test, he takes her back. His experience becomes a symbol of God's relationship with Israel, the bride of God. Israel has become a faithless harlot, has aroused the anger and jealousy of her divine husband, but, like Hosea, God's love remains. He will punish Israel but only to bring her back. For the first time God's relationship with Israel is described in terms of a marriage the underlying theme being that divine love is misunderstood by the people on whom it is lavished. Once the golden period of the desert was over Israel played false. Hosea indicts the kings, the priests and holds that the worship at Bethel is idolatrous worship where Yahweh is coupled with Baal and Astarte in the licentious rites of the high places. Yahweh says through his prophet 'What I want is love, not sacrifice; knowledge of God, not burnt offerings.' Punishment is sure to come but Yahweh will welcome his repentant people back. The prophecy had a profound effect on the OT developing a religion of the heart. The wedding image is used by Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Isaiah II and the NT and the early Church applied it to the union between Christ and his Church.

The reading, 6.3-6, comes from the section of the prophecy which speaks of the crimes of Israel and their consequent punishment. In our reading the people, frightened by the threat of punishment and abandonment of God, call for a return to him, 'Let us know let us strive to know Yahweh.' But this desire is devoid of any inner conversion and prompts God to declare that their love for him lasts no longer than the morning cloud or the dew. So the people are punished with the prophet's words which produce what they predict. The Israelites must learn that what God desires is love not sacrifice, knowledge of God not burnt offerings.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 49.1,8,12-15, is about worshipping God who says in the first verse that he finds no fault with their offerings and sacrifices, God is not hungry for the flesh and blood of their sacrifices but he does want thanks for what he has done for Israel and for them to fulfil their vows by which they have promised to live their lives. If they do this they can call on God in their troubles and he will rescue them and will thereby honour him.

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, 4.18-25, comes from the section of the letter where Paul is teaching about the example of Abraham. Paul teaches that it was his faith in God that justified Abraham and he was justified before the law of circumcision and not by obeying the Law which didn't exist in Abraham's day. Paul then goes on to teach in the reading that Abraham's faith is a model of Christian faith. Abraham was childless and God's promise that he would be the father of a great nation seemed unbelievable but Abraham trusted in God and believed God's word and as the reading proclaims, 'This is the faith that was considered as justifying him.' Paul concludes that 'our faith too will be considered (as justifying us) if we believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.'