

THE ELEVENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - C

This Sunday's readings encourage us to reflect upon God's forgiveness of our sins and to some extent our response to the sinner. In the gospel reading we have the story of a rich Pharisee, Simon, who is amazed at Jesus tolerance and compassion for a woman 'who had a bad reputation in the town.' The woman shows her love for Jesus in the only way she can, and her great act of love earns her God's forgiveness. In the first reading David is confronted by the prophet Nathan because he has compounded his act of adultery with murder and yet he is assured of God's forgiveness. The second reading continues with the letter to the Galatians in which Paul repeats his teaching 'that faith in Christ rather than fidelity to the Law is what justifies us.'

The **First Reading** is from the second book of Samuel which only briefly mentions the political consequences of king David's reign. The troublesome Philistines were repelled for good and the rest of the national territory was unified with absorption of many Canaanite enclaves including, importantly, Jerusalem which became the political and religious capital. David extended his authority further into Transjordan and to the northeast into southern Syria. Nonetheless when David died in 970, national unity had not been achieved and the two sections of his kingdom Judah and Israel to the north, soon found themselves at loggerheads again. The books of Samuel have a religious lesson. They reveal the conditions in which a kingdom of God might be expected to function and the difficulties that might be experienced. The ideal was only achieved in the reign of David. King Saul, before David, was a failure and his successors, by their sinful conduct, thwarted the growth of God's kingdom. It is the promises made in the prophecy of Nathan (2 Samuel 7.12-17) that sustained and nourished the messianic hope through the centuries.

The reading, 12.7-10,13, are the words of the prophet. In the previous chapter we read of David's adultery with Bathsheba, Uriah's wife, and when she tells David she is with child David tries to cover up his sin by recalling Uriah from the battlefield. When this is unsuccessful he sends Uriah back with orders that he is to be stationed where the fighting is fiercest, and Uriah is killed. Nathan comes to David and tells him about two men, one rich the other poor, the rich man had many flocks of sheep the poor man just one sheep. When a traveller came to stay the rich man stole the poor man's sheep to provide the wayfarer with a meal. David flew into a rage and said the man deserved to die. Nathan said, 'You are that man!' and now the reading begins. Nathan points out all that God has done for David and yet David has shown contempt for God by his actions. David, always ready to confess his sin, receives God's forgiveness.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 31.1-2,5,7,11, is a psalm of admission of sin, a penitential psalm, a reflection on the first reading. The first verse reflects clearly David's feelings when the prophet tells him he is forgiven. The second verse may be seen as David's resolution. The third verse sees David's confidence in God even though he is a sinner. The psalm ends in praise of God.

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 no 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, 2.16,19-21, is part of a passage addressed to all Judaisers (i.e. those who think the old Law must be carried out in every detail) particularly those in Galatia. They must become dead to the Law so that they can live for God and then comes the well known passage in a former translation, 'I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me.' Paul is intent on pointing out that living as we do in our bodies, we live in faith, 'faith in the Son of God who loved me and who sacrificed himself for my sake.' Paul cannot give up this gift of faith. He concludes by saying that if the Law can effect our justification then there was no point in Christ's death. The problem for the early Church would seem to have been considerable and for some who did practice the Jewish faith and immense difficulty. For us today the lesson must be to realize our life in Christ is all important and while we haven't the old Law trying drag us away there are many other aspects of life which tempt us away from living our life in Christ.