

THE ELEVENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – A

The gospel reading begins with Jesus seeing the crowds like sheep without a shepherd. He summons the twelve and having given them authority over the powers of the devil he sends them out 'to proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.' The apostles have authority to cure people of their diseases often seen as the result of sin, the devil's work. In the first reading the Israelites reach Mt Sinai and Moses ascends the mountain where God proposes to make a covenant with Israel. In the second reading Paul teaches about the salvation Christ won for us by dying 'for the godless.'

The **First Reading** is from the book of Exodus, the second book in the Bible and the second book of the Law. This book has two main themes: the birth and call of Moses and the deliverance of the Israelite people from Egypt and the Covenant God made with the Israelites at Mt Sinai through Moses, the two are connected by the journey through the desert. Like the book of Genesis, Exodus is a compilation of three earlier documents and our reading today comes from the Yahwistic tradition which has a lively and vivid style and although God is described in human terms the author has a deep sense of the divine.

The reading, 19.2-6, begins telling us that the Israelites have completed their journey to Mt Sinai, they pitch camp then Moses ascends the mountain and God speaks. God tells Moses that that they have all seen what God did for them bringing them out of Egypt 'how I carried you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself.' So God says they must now know 'if you obey my voice and hold fast to my covenant' that they will be God's own people for God owns everything on earth. 'I will count you a kingdom of priests, a consecrated nation' says God to Moses. We have much to learn from the Old Testament.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 99.1-3,5, is in praise of God and was perhaps recited on entering the sanctuary of the Temple to offer communion sacrifices. For us it is a reflection on the first reading of God's goodness and the covenant offered to the chosen people.

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, 5.6-11, comes from the section of the letter which deals with salvation. Faith guarantees our salvation because faith enables God's love and the gift of the Spirit to be active in our lives. Paul teaches that we must know that God loves us because he allowed his Son to die for us when we were still sinners. By his death we were justified and we can be sure we shall be saved from the just retribution of God because while we were still God's enemies we were reconciled to God by Christ's death and being now reconciled to God 'we shall be saved by his life.' Christ by his life, death and resurrection following the Father's will means 'we are filled with exultant trust in God.' Paul brings home to us the real joy we should experience when we know the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection.