

THE TWELVETH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - C

The reading from Luke's gospel comes towards the end of Jesus' Galilean ministry and an important episode in the gospel account. Once again, as is characteristic of Luke, Jesus is at prayer before this important occasion. Jesus puts a question to his disciples about his identity which Peter answers. Then Jesus for the first time reveals his destiny, 'the Son of Man is destined to suffer grievously...and to be put to death.' In the first reading the prophet Zechariah speaks about 'the one whom they have pierced' and a time of mourning for sin and impurity. The second reading Paul continues to press home to the Galatians that, no matter what race or social standing, 'you have all clothed yourselves in Christ.'

The **First Reading** is from the book of Zechariah, one of twelve minor prophets. The prophecy along with that of Haggai, two post-exilic prophets, speaks words of encouragement to rebuild the Temple. Before the Exile the prophets wrote of punishment for misdeeds, during the Exile the message was one of consolation, now after the Exile it was one of restoration, rebuilding the Temple. A few months before Zechariah Haggai, August-December 520, had exhorted the returned exiles to rebuild the Temple, Zechariah now continues the message of restoration but lays more stress on national restoration and the irreproachable conduct that this demands. Zechariah also has a more urgent awareness of the end of time. The book is clearly divided into two parts, chs.1-8: 9-14. The main part of the first section contains eight of the prophet's visions. The restoration will inaugurate a messianic era in which the priesthood, Joshua, will be held in great honour and God's servant 'the Branch' or the rising sun will wield sovereign power. Royal messianism is revived to be perfected in the person of Christ. The second part has little connection with the first being composed c.320 and can be divided into two sections 9-11,12-14. The first uses ancient pre-exilic pieces of poetry referring to historical events difficult to identify. The second describes the ordeals and triumphs of Jerusalem in the last days, the end of the world. This second part of the book is of interest for its messianic teaching, the NT often quotes Zechariah seeing much of his thought being realised in Christ.

The reading, 12.10-11,13.1, is difficult to interpret. The passage would seem to be set at the end of time as the verse before our reading says, 'When that day comes I will set about destroying all the nations who advance against Jerusalem' (the heavenly Jerusalem?). But over the house of David the prospect is quite different. The messianic age depends on a passion and mysterious death, 'the one whom they have pierced,' which will result in great mourning, the reading concludes 'when that day comes' (the end of time) there will be a fountain to bring about complete purification. John in his gospel, 19.37, uses the text about the pierced one in reference to Christ. The ritual mourning for Hadad Rimmon, names for Syrian storm gods, is compared to the mourning to come in Jerusalem.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 62.2-6,8-9, is possibly a psalm applied to David during his desert wanderings when he longed for God's presence. For us today the psalm is a response to the 'great mourning in Judah' spoken of in the first reading. More generally for those who have to suffer expected or unexpected pain the psalm is a prayer of hope that brings fulfillment, 'my soul shall be filled as with a banquet.'

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, 3.26-29, continues Paul's teaching to the Galatians that by belonging to Christ they are the posterity of Abraham who was called by God to be the father of a new people from whom the Christ would be born. Christ's genealogy stretches back to Abraham and what God promised to Abraham and his posterity means, since they are now 'one in Christ Jesus,' that they are all part of Abraham's family and heirs to all that God promised Abraham and his family.