

## THE TWELVETH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – A

The gospel reading is part of the instruction Jesus gave to the Twelve before he sends them out to preach the gospel. He 'gave them authority over unclean spirits with power to drive them out and cure all kinds of disease and all kinds of illness.' There follows a long instruction of which we have a few verses. They are not to be afraid to proclaim the gospel message openly even if it means they have to suffer physical torment, the reward will be that Jesus will acknowledge them before his Father. The first reading tells of Jeremiah's trust in God amid his anguish. In the second reading Paul teaches about Adam prefiguring the Christ. Adam was responsible for man's fall from grace Christ's death more than paid for man's sin.

The **First Reading** is from the prophet Jeremiah one of the major prophets in Israel. He was called by God as a young man in the reign of Josiah, a good king of Judah when there were hopes for reform and a return to Godly ways. Josiah was killed in battle in 609 and with the rise of the Chaldean empire, king Nebuchadnezzar imposed his rule on Judah who sought support from Egypt. They revolted twice, in 597 and 587, which resulted in the capture and destruction of the Temple and the city, many of its inhabitants being carried off into slavery to Babylon. Jeremiah lived and worked in these final traumatic days, preaching, issuing threats of God's anger and foretelling the final disaster. He suffered greatly not only from those who considered him a defeatist because he was opposed to war as a solution to Judah's problems but also from his own inner conflicts. A man of peace he had to fight against the whole population from kings and priests to false prophets and the whole nation. He was a Job-like figure inwardly tortured by the work God had given him to do, but all this helped to purify his soul and he saw Israel's relationship with God in a new light. God looks at the heart and rewards each according to their works. So the new covenant (31.31-34) expresses a new start, a new relationship with God, the Law will no longer be written on tablets of stone but within the hearts of the people of Israel. Jeremiah died a failure, a fugitive in Egypt, but his teachings grew in importance in helping to shape the future of Israel. The reading, 20.10-13, is from the 'Confessions' of Jeremiah. He tells how so many disparaged him he felt 'Terror on every side!' His enemies seek Jeremiah's downfall but he remains convinced that God is a God of Grace and even in the depths of his anguish he utters a cry of hope, 'God is at my side like a mighty hero; my opponents will stumble....everlasting, unforgettable disgrace will be theirs.'

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 68.8-10,14,17,33-35, in the first verse is a lament, a cry of distress for one who suffers for his zeal, this is followed in the second verse with a prayer and the last verse is a hymn which has world wide application.

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, 5.12-15, speaks of Adam and Jesus Christ. Paul teaches that sin came into the world through one man 'and through sin death' and as a consequence all must pass through death because we have all sinned. Death existed before the Law came into being so death did not come about as a result of breaking the Law. Paul teaches that Adam prefigured the Christ but the gift of salvation that the Christ bought with his life means 'there is no comparison between the free gift and the offence.' Adam's sin brought death. 'If death came to many through the offence of one man, how much greater an effect the grace of God has had, coming to so many and so plentifully as a free gift through one man Jesus Christ.'