

## THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – C

In the gospel reading the Lucan Jesus 'resolutely' takes the road for Jerusalem. The reading contains two teachings; that we must be tolerant to those who do not hold our religious views and to become a follower of Christ requires determination and acceptance of hardship. In the first reading we hear of the call of Elisha, the prophet. In the second reading Paul tells the Galatians how they should live their lives now that they are freed from the burden of the old Law.

The **First Reading** is from the first book of Kings, one of the historical books of the Bible. Books 1 and 2 Kings are a continuation from books 1 and 2 Samuel, indeed the first two chapters of 1 Kings which deal with the death of king David, are the concluding chapters of 2 Samuel 9-20. The two books of Kings deal with the reign of Solomon, 1 Kings 3-11, his wisdom, his riches, his building programme including the Temple. It was an age of peace but also of exploitation which aggravated the existing hostility between Judah, in the south, and the northern tribes, Israel. On Solomon's death his kingdom split in two and to the political secession of the northern tribes was added religious schism. This was a period of fraternal strife and attacks from outside; Egypt attacked Judah and the Aramaeans (Syria) attacked the northern tribes. This was only a prelude to the fall of Samaria, capital of the North, to the Assyrians in 721 and the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonian king in 587, followed by Exile. Woven in among these accounts are the Elijah and Elisha cycles, the two great prophets of the period who had much to say about the religious conduct of the kings of the North. After the political division the kings of Israel are all judged guilty of abandoning Temple sacrifice and erecting a shrine of their own at Bethel, and only two kings of Judah receive fulsome praise. All this ran contrary to the teaching of Deuteronomy that the Temple alone was the place for sacrifice and that the nation will be blessed only if it respects God's covenant and it will be punished if it does not.

The reading, 19.16,19-21, tells of the call of Elisha who is to succeed Elijah as prophet in Israel. The reading follows on from a dejected Elijah who has walked all the way to God's holy mountain, Horeb, only to be told by God who speaks like 'a light murmuring sound' that he must return whence he came 'and anoint Elisha...as prophet to succeed you.' By throwing his cloak over Elisha, Elijah acquires authority over him, an authority which Elisha cannot resist. In killing two of his oxen and destroying their tackle Elisha formally renounces his former way of life and follows Elijah, becoming his servant.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 15.1-2,5,7-11, is a psalm which shows trust and confidence in God. The psalmist takes refuge in God; Yahweh is his portion, his prize; he rests secure because his lively faith and total commitment to God means he is closely united to God and so he prays to escape death which would break his union with God. This vague hope is leading towards a belief in resurrection.

The **Second Reading** is from Paul's letter to the Galatians. Galatia was part of central Turkey and Paul preached in the southern tip of Galatia on his first missionary journey and he passed through northern Galatia on his second and third missionary journeys. It is uncertain where the letter was written, Ephesus or Macedonia, and when, possibly about the year 57. In the letter, after his introduction, Paul gives an account of his conversion and his meeting in Jerusalem with the elders of the Church which brings out the main point of this letter. After preaching the Risen Christ to the Galatians and bringing them into the Church some Judaisers, that is, those who held that the Old Law and its practises should not be abandoned, unsettled the Galatians in their new found faith. Paul says to the Galatians that they are stupid people and someone has put a spell on them. Abraham put his faith in God which made him righteous in the sight of God, yet he lived many years before the Law given to Moses. It is not keeping the Law which brings righteousness but faith and for the Galatians it is their faith in Jesus Christ. The Israelites were slaves under the Law but Christ by his death has released them from slavery and enabled them to become adopted sons of God. Paul concludes his letter with an exhortation on Christian liberty and love, kindness and perseverance.

The reading, 5.1,13-18, begins with Paul repeating the freedom the Galatians have in Christ and they are not to become slaves to the old Jewish Law. They must use this freedom to 'be servants to one another in love.' There must be no ill-will among them nor giving way to self-indulgence rather they must be guided by the Spirit then they will not be under (slaves to) the old Mosaic Law.