

THE FIFTEENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - C

In the reading from Luke's gospel we are on the journey to Jerusalem. For Luke who has shown Jesus beginning his ministry in Jerusalem, Jesus must bring his mission to an end there a prophet cannot die outside Jerusalem. On his way Jesus is confronted by a lawyer who having asked what he must do to inherit eternal life requested that Jesus gives an explanation of his answer and Jesus explains by telling the wonderful parable of the Good Samaritan. In the first reading we learn that the Word of God is very near us 'it is in your mouth and in your heart.' In the second reading we begin to listen to Paul's letter to the Colossians. Christ is the image of the unseen God, he existed before creation but now the Church is his body, he is the first born from the dead and all perfection is found in him.

The **First Reading** is from the fifth book of the Law, the book of Deuteronomy. This book as the name suggests is a second law book and is distinct from the other four books of the Law in that, apart from chapters 31 and 34, it comes from a single written tradition: the Deuteronomic. This tradition has a distinctive style and its teaching constantly reaffirms that of all nations in the world, God has, out of pure love, chosen Israel to be his people, but this choice and the Covenant made with his people ratifying this choice are conditional on Israel giving allegiance exclusively to God, and to the prescribed worship to be offered to God in one single place of worship. The book is a code of civil and religious laws which are framed within a long discourse of Moses. The concluding chapters deal with the final days of Moses, the commissioning of Joshua to succeed Moses and Moses' death in sight of the Promised Land. The Deuteronomic code is a partial restatement of the laws promulgated in the desert and recalls the great events of Exodus, of Sinai and of the beginnings of the conquest of the Promised Land. Later the principles of Moses were re-thought by the prophets and adapted to the situation of the Israelites living in Palestine 600 years after Moses. After the fall of Samaria, 721, the book was stored away in the Temple in Jerusalem to be rediscovered in the reign of Josiah, 622. It was re-edited at the beginning of the Exile 587 and came to be regarded as a code of law laid down in his final years by Moses in Moab.

The reading, 30.10-14, comes from the final discourse of Moses which is in some sense a summary of his teaching. The first sentence of the reading is preceded by these words of Moses, 'Yahweh will delight in your prosperity as he used to take delight in the prosperity of your ancestors if you obey the voice of Yahweh....' which is where our reading begins. If they wish to be a prosperous nation then they must obey the voice of the Lord. Moses goes on to say he is not asking too much 'the Law...is not beyond your strength or beyond your reach.' And Moses goes on to say, the Law is neither in heaven nor beyond the seas out of your reach 'no, it is near you, it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to put into practice' words which echo the words of Jesus to the lawyer in the gospel reading, 'Go and do the same yourself.'

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 68.14,17,30-31,33-34,36-37, is a lament, a messianic psalm in the sense that the words can be applied to Christ's sufferings. The first verse reveals the servant's confidence in God who has compassion and whose love never fails. When overcome with pain the servant still looks to God to raise him up and he turns again to praise the love of God. The third verse refers to the poor who seek God and in doing so are revived. Finally the complete trust that the devastated cities of Judah will be rebuilt for those who love God to dwell in. As a response to the first reading the psalm shows great trust in God which is reflected in keeping his Law.

The **Second Reading** is from St Paul's letter to the Colossians 3.1-4. In this letter Paul is trying to deal with Jewish speculation which the churches at Colossae had taken up. They thought the celestial or cosmic powers were responsible for the regular movement of the cosmos and they attached an importance to these powers that threatened the supremacy of Christ. Paul writes to show that these powers have a subordinate place in the scheme of salvation and that Christ, raised up to heaven, governs the whole cosmos which is influenced by the saving act of the one, only Lord of all creation.

The reading, 1.15-20, is part of a poem, at the beginning of the letter, which begins the formal instruction. The subject of the poem is the pre-existent Christ who became manifest in his human nature, Jesus Christ. He is the author of all creation in heaven and on earth, of all that exists naturally. He is also the head of a new creation and of all that exists supernaturally as a result of his redemption. So Christ is the head of the Church, his body, since he is the first born from the dead, the first of a new creation. The reading also says 'God wanted all fullness to be found in him' in the sense that the entire cosmos is filled with the creative presence of God as a result of the Incarnation and Resurrection. The reading concludes speaking of universal reconciliation, that is, the collective salvation of the world by its return to the right order and peace in perfect submission to the will of God, the order and peace designed by God in the beginning. We can see how Paul is clearly and firmly setting out his teaching on Christ's position in the order of things natural and supernatural, later Paul will deal with erroneous teaching that denies Christ his exclusive exalted position.