

## THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - C

In the gospel reading, Jesus, still on his way to Jerusalem, comes to a village where Martha welcomes him into her house and busies herself with preparing a meal while sister Mary sits at Jesus' feet listening to every word from his mouth. This is another story where Luke gives prominence to women and we learn more of the spiritual dimension of Jesus' gospel. The first reading is about preparing food too, Abraham has three strange visitors for whom he prepares a meal and then receives a message from God. The second reading continues with the letter to the Colossians in which Paul gives further teaching about the Christ, he is the wisdom in which everyone is trained and instructed.

The **First Reading** is from the book of Genesis the first book in the Bible and the first book of the Pentateuch, the five books of the Jewish Law. The book's origins are still uncertain, it speaks of mankind's beginnings and then the history of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob until their arrival in Egypt. The book is a composite of three documents the Yahwist, (J), the Elohist, (E) and the Priestly, (P) that go to make up the book of Genesis whose authorship, although attributed to Moses, is unknown. The Yahwistic tradition has a lively and vivid style and although God is described in human terms the author has a deep sense of the divine. The Elohist tradition is more sober in style with an exacting moral code and an insistence on the distance separating human beings from God. The Priestly tradition contributes laws and is particularly concerned with the organisation of the sanctuary, with sacrifices and festivals and with the person of Aaron, the priest and his descendants. This is the tradition of the priests of the Temple of Jerusalem. The Yahwist and the Elohist were possibly committed to writing on the reign of Solomon c.950 whereas the Priestly was not codified until the Exile 587-538 and added to the Pentateuch after the return from exile.

The reading, 18.1-10, is a lovely story of God visiting Abraham and he gets his wife Sarah hurriedly to prepare a meal for his guests. You will notice in the reading that the text is frequently uncertain in its choice of singular or plural when referring to Abraham's guests. The three men mentioned whom Abraham address as 'My Lord', were seen by the Fathers, theologians in the early Church, to foreshadow the mystery of the Trinity, a teaching not revealed until the NT. The meal is duly prepared and presented but Abraham does not participate we have to wait until the NT before we can participate at the table of the Lord. Abraham is then told at the end of the reading that his wife Sarah will have a child and the reading goes on to tell of Sarah's disbelief. This is the first of many strange conceptions in the OT culminating with the conceptions of John the Baptist and Jesus in the NT.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 14.2-5, begins by asking who can dwell on God's holy mountain, a reference to Jerusalem. The psalm then goes on to give a summary of the moral conduct expected of God's loyal subjects, one who hopes to live in God's presence. The psalm's precepts can be compared with the moral precepts given in the Ten Commandments.

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, 1.24-28, speaks of Paul's labours in the service of the gentiles. The words stating that Paul is happy 'to do what I can to make up all that has still to be undergone by Christ for the sake of his body, the Church' should not be read as Paul adding anything to the redemptive value of Christ's death on the Cross. Rather Paul is associating himself with the trials of Jesus by his sufferings in the apostolate. This is all part of the Church's development. We can think back to Jesus telling his disciples that everyone of his followers must be prepared to take up his cross daily. Paul makes clear his mission from God is to deliver the message hidden during OT times but now revealed to his saints that is all who have accepted the word and believe. This message is not reserved for the people of Israel but revealed to all peoples, the pagans, and the message: 'the mystery is Christ among you, your hope and your glory.' Paul speaks of this as 'wisdom' in which everyone is to be instructed.