

THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – A

The gospel reading continues with Jesus' parables. We listen to the kingdom of heaven being compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, to a mustard seed, to a woman mixing yeast with three measures of flour followed by an explanation of the first parable. The first reading from the book of Wisdom speaks of our God as a sovereign master who governs all peoples with lenience. The second reading continues Paul's teaching on the role of the Spirit who expresses our prayerful thoughts cogently.

The **First Reading** is from the book of Wisdom. The wisdom literature in the Bible comes after the historical books and comprises the books of Job, the Psalms, the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, the Book of Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus. Wisdom literature flourished throughout the ancient East, it treats of the meaning of life and offers a recipe for successful living. Wisdom literature in Israel came from the same soil and was absorbed in the individual and his destiny but was viewed in the clearer light of the religion of Yahweh. Real wisdom is found in the fear of God since God alone is wise. Wisdom is an outpouring of the glory of the Almighty, an image of his perfection. Wisdom is sure to bring happiness and folly, ruin. This is the doctrine on which the teaching of Wisdom is based. All this teaching was preparing for the revelation of Wisdom incarnate as Matthew says: "here is someone greater than Solomon."

The book of Wisdom itself may be divided as follows, the first section, ch.1-5, defines the function of Wisdom in man's destiny; the second section, ch.6-9, treats of the origin and nature of Wisdom; the last section, ch.10-19, celebrates the part played by Wisdom and by God in the history of the chosen people. The authorship is attributed to Solomon, the wisest king in Israel. The author was an Alexandrian Jew who wrote towards the middle of the 1st century B.C., he commends Wisdom, born of God, obtained by prayer, the mainspring of all the virtues. This life is seen as a preparation for another in which the virtuous live with God and the wicked are punished. He sees Wisdom as an attribute of God.

The reading, 12.13,16-19, comes from the third section of the book which deals with Wisdom and God in the history of Israel. The writer is wondering, chapter 12.3-11, why, if he so hated their 'loathsome practices,' God 'gave them (the Canaanites) the chance to repent.' In the following section this forbearance by God is explained. No guilty man could challenge God's decisions, and here our reading begins: 'For there is no god other than you who cares for everything.' So God can care even for the Canaanites. He never judges unjustly, he doesn't use his power like the wicked to defeat justice rather he uses his power to temper his justice. If people defy his power, like Pharaoh, God exposes their insolence, otherwise he is mild in judgement and governs with great lenience; God has only to will something and it is done. So God teaches us how we must be kind to one another and he gives us hope of gaining repentance for our sins. I recommend you read the headings of chapters 10 & 11 and read chapter 12 from verse 3 as a good preparation.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 85.5-6,9-10,15-15, reveals the goodness of God in time of trial, he is good and forgiving, full of love for those who call on him. All nations will come to adore our God for his marvellous works, for he is a God of mercy and compassion, slow to anger, full of love and truth. A fitting response to the thought expressed in the first reading in which God governs us 'with great lenience.'

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, 8.26-27, follows on from the thoughts expressed in the previous verses read last week in which Paul spoke of the 'whole of creation....groaning in labour pains. And we too....are groaning inside ourselves waiting with eagerness for our bodies to be set free.' Paul teaches we hope for what we cannot see 'and, (our reading now begins) as well as this the Spirit comes to help us in our weakness.' We are not sure how to pray properly and 'the Spirit personally makes our petitions for us.' God who can see into everyone's heart 'knows what the Spirit means because the prayers that the Spirit makes....are always in accordance with the mind of God.' The Spirit doesn't pray for us for Paul insists on the necessity of constant prayer even if we do not know how to pray properly for the Spirit intervenes on our behalf 'personally making our petitions for us.' The reading should give us more confidence when we pray.