

THE SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - C

In the gospel reading, as Jesus makes his way to Jerusalem, we are given three teachings about prayer, the first: what should we say when we pray? Jesus' response is, say, 'Father may your name be held holy.' The second is a story teaching us to be persistent in our prayer and not to give up. Lastly Jesus repeats in a different form that we should use every avenue in prayer to God with confidence that our prayer will be answered. Mirroring this teaching we have in the first reading the story of Abraham bargaining in prayer with God for the town of Sodom. In the second reading we continue with Colossians and here about the power of Christ's resurrection in our lives.

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, 18.20-32, follows the story from Genesis in last week's first reading. After having the meal provided by Abraham and Sarah the visitors set out and arrive 'within sight of Sodom with Abraham accompanying them.' God sends his messengers find out if the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is true meanwhile 'Yahweh remained in Abraham's presence.' Abraham approaches God with the question which troubles us all, must good people suffer along with, and because of, the wicked? The conviction of collective responsibility was so strong in ancient Israel that the question, whether the innocent may be spared individually, does not arise in our reading. The principle of individual responsibility came later. Abraham's prayer is, presuming all will share in God's punishment, may a few upright people win pardon for the many wicked. Abraham does not venture below ten. According to Jeremiah and Ezekiel God would pardon Jerusalem if only one innocent person could be found there. In Isaiah it is the one suffering servant who is to save the whole race which the NT sees fulfilled in Christ.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 137.1-3,6-8, is a psalm of thanksgiving which reflects on the thoughts expressed in the first reading, God listens to Abraham's prayer for Lot and his family are saved. The words themselves need little explanation but we must admire the faith of the psalmist in those far off days without the revelation that came with the Incarnation.

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 2.12-14 continues with Paul teaching about the centrality of Christ in the Christian faith. It is Christ's resurrection through the power of God which makes our baptism, an image of Christ's death, fruitful. Paul refers to circumcision in a Christian sense. Christian circumcision is baptism, so when Paul says, 'you were sinners and had not been circumcised' Paul means they had not been baptised, but through baptism 'he, (i.e. God the Father), has brought you to life with him, he has forgiven us every one of our sins.' The Law, so revered by the Jews, has been overridden, our debt to the Law has been wiped away. The Law was unable to do anything for the sinner except condemn him to death and this death sentence is what God the Father suppressed by means of the death of his own Son. That is why Paul tells his fellow Israelites that they through baptism belong to Christ, the Law no longer has power over them.