

## THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - C

The gospel reading is warning us against relying too much on our worldly wealth as Jesus says in the gospel reading 'a man's life is not made secure by what he owns, even when he has more than he needs.' Jesus then goes on to tell a parable about a man who has a bumper harvest and having gathered it all in thinks he is safe and secure for many years to come, but God has other ideas for him. The first reading from the book of Ecclesiastes describes the accumulation of wealth as vanity. In the second reading we continue with Paul's letter to the Colossians in which Paul urges his readers to cloth themselves in Christ and to cast off their former way of living.

The **First Reading** is from the book of Ecclesiastes which title comes from the opening verse of the book, 'Composition of Qoheleth son of David, King of Jerusalem.' Qoheleth indicates the function of the one who speaks in the assembly which in Greek is *ekklesia* from which we get the book's Latin and hence English name, a transliteration of the Greek, Ecclesiastes. Although attributed to king Solomon, the book is post-exilic (i.e. post 538BC) with possibly as many as eight people helping in its composition. The book may be equally divided between the first six and last six chapters and deals with the futility of things human; knowledge, wealth, love, life itself, all things are illusory. The several authors present their various solutions when confronted with the mystery of mysteries which give rise to self-corrections and self-contradictions. As with Job, Qoheleth concludes that the answers to life are to be found beyond the grave. The book has parallels with Egyptian literature and Mesopotamian wisdom such as the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Qoheleth is a Palestinian Jew who wrote in the third century BC. The book represents only one stage in the religious development of Israel and must be assessed in the light of past literature and what follows. The enigma of human existence looks to the need for a new revelation, attachment to riches is decried, the rich are not happy and the book thus prepares us for the teaching of Christ 'blessed are the poor.'

The reading, 1.2, 2.21-23, starts with a well known phrase which may also be translated, 'Sheer futility, Qoheleth says. Sheer futility: everything is futile.' This translation may be more helpful than the usual 'Vanity' in helping us to understand the thought of the writer. The primary meaning of futility used here is 'mist,' 'breath' which in Hebrew poetry were used to describe the transitory nature of all that is human. The writer wishes to express the illusory nature of things. Compared with trusting in God everything in this world seems futile. The reading then follows a similar thought to that expressed in the gospel reading. A man expends his time labouring 'wisely, skilfully and successfully' but must leave all to someone else who has not toiled. The writer declares 'this is futile and grossly unjust' seen in the light of this world. For what does the man gain 'since his days are full of sorrow, his work full of stress and even at night he has no peace of mind? This too is futile.' Consequently the writer looks beyond the grave for a satisfactory explanation of life.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 89.3-6,12-14, is a reflection on human frailty, a fitting response to the first reading. The psalm speaks of the shortness of life compared to the eternity in which God exists, man is to be compared with the grasses of the field which seem to last no more than a day. The psalmist seeks wisdom and God's pity that we may be filled with God's love all our days.

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, 3.1-5,9-11, is about the life-giving union we have with the glorified Christ as a result of our baptism. Christ is in heaven where our thoughts should be concentrated. This glorious life which at present 'is hidden with Christ in God' will be revealed on the day Christ comes in all his glory. Paul then goes on to condemn the kind of behaviour which will destroy this life in Christ. We have stripped ourselves of this kind of life to clothe ourselves with 'a new self which will progress towards true knowledge the more it is renewed in the image of its Creator.' In that image Paul teaches there is no distinction to be made between either race or creed. 'There is only Christ: he is everything and he is in everything.' The centrality of Christ is so important in Paul's teaching.