

THE TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - C

In this Sunday's reading we listen to Jesus teaching the guests of a leading Pharisee not to presume to take the best places at table as by right and secondly how to store up treasure for themselves in heaven. The first reading from Ecclesiasticus is teaching a similar lesson to the gospel reading, you should behave humbly for there is no cure for the proud man's malady. In the second reading we continue with the letter to the Hebrews which speaks of the heavenly Jerusalem our final home with God himself.

The **First Reading** is from the book of Ecclesiasticus, one of the Wisdom books found in the Bible. Written originally in Hebrew and then translated into Greek, it is the Greek text which is recognised by the Church as part of the Canon of Scripture. The subscription at the end of the book reads, "Wisdom of Jesus, son of (Ben) Sira" 51.30. At the beginning of the book is a foreword written by the translator, the grandson of Ben Sira, who translated the book into Greek when he went to settle in Egypt c.132 BC. At the time of writing Palestine was under the dominion of the Seleucids, Greek kings, who imposed a Greek way of life, Hellenisation, on the people. It was against these dangerous innovations that Ben Sira wrote to defend the traditions of Israel. He was a scribe who sought both wisdom and respect for the Law. He had a high regard for the Temple, its liturgy and the priestly office. His thought was nourished by reading the sacred books of Israel, especially the Prophets and Wisdom literature. The form of the book resembles previous wisdom books, lacking any apparent order, but it is traditional in that Wisdom which comes from God is rooted in the fear of the Lord, bringing happiness in its wake. The book's original contribution is in identifying Wisdom with the Law of Moses. Ben Sira meditates on the history of salvation reviewing the great personalities throughout the OT. All the kings of Judah and Israel are variously condemned except David, Hezekiah and Josiah, even Solomon receives a severe verdict, yet, Ben Sira is proud of his people's past, the great figures of history and the wonders God worked through them. He gives prominence to the doctrine of the covenant, the promises God made to his people but does not look forward to the coming of a messiah to deliver his people this will come from fidelity to the Law. In the meantime he accepts his people's situation under Greek domination with humility and peace.

The reading, 3.19-21,30-31, comes from a collection of maxims to do with humility. Gentleness in business is better than someone who hopes to make an impression from giving presents. Humility will find favour with the Lord not brash bold behaviour. The last two verses of the reading deal with advice about pride. Pride is like a disease which takes root with 'no cure for the proud man's malady' whereas the humble person is prepared to learn, 'reflect on parables', and has 'an attentive ear' not full of his own importance.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 67.4-7,10-11, is a long psalm about Israel's glory due to God's mighty works on her behalf. For us on this Sunday it is a psalm praising God for he defends the orphan and widow and sends down a generous rain for the starving poor. As reflection on the first reading the psalm gives first place to God and our indebtedness to God is recognized.

The **Second Reading** is from the letter to the Hebrews. This wonderful letter to the Jewish Christians was for a time attributed to Paul's pen but now this is considered not to be the case although he is considered to have had some indirect influence on the letter's contents. It would seem from internal evidence that the letter was written about 67AD. The letter is addressed to Jewish people who have a good knowledge of the covenant God made with their people, and who became Christians. They left Jerusalem and with an uncertain faith, they yearn for the splendour of the ceremonies carried out in the Temple. They are tempted to revert to Judaism, but the writer is intent on preventing this by helping them to see their new life in Christ. They are on a new exodus to the Promised Land (heaven), with Christ, not Moses, as their leader whose one sacrifice on the Cross replaces the many sacrifices of the old priesthood. The letter is a good teaching letter for us showing the harmony between the Old and New Testaments.

The reading, 12.18-19,22-24, begins by listing several things which might draw our attention and make us think but it is not these, dramatic as they are to our senses, which are of any purpose rather the writer is wanting to point out the Promised Land namely 'Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem' as the focus of thinking. Here we will come to be with God himself and with Jesus who has forged a new covenant with us which will last forever and make us perfect. This surely will give purpose and meaning to our lives.