

THE TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – A

The gospel reading continues from last Sunday when Peter professed his faith in Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the living God. Peter is now to be taught how the Christ will fulfil his mission. He has a lot to learn about suffering being a condition of following the Christ. In the first reading we hear how Jeremiah learns this truth as a prophet who foretells the Christ. In the second reading Paul teaches the Roman Christians a similar lesson they must worship the living God 'by offering their living bodies as a holy sacrifice truly pleasing to God.'

The **First Reading** is from the prophet Jeremiah, one of the major prophets in Israel. He was called by God as a young man in the reign of Josiah, a good king of Judah when there were hopes for reform and a return to Godly ways. Josiah was killed in battle in 609 and with the rise of the Chaldean empire, king Nebuchadnezzar imposed his rule on Judah who sought support from Egypt. They revolted twice, in 597 and 587, which resulted in the capture and destruction of the Temple and the city, many of its inhabitants being carried off into slavery to Babylon. Jeremiah lived and worked in these final traumatic days, preaching, issuing threats of God's anger and foretelling the final disaster. He suffered greatly not only from those who considered him a defeatist because he was opposed to war as a solution to Judah's problems but also from his own inner conflicts. A man of peace he had to fight against the whole population from kings and priests to false prophets and the whole nation. He was a Job-like figure inwardly tortured by the work God had given him to do, but all this helped to purify his soul and he saw Israel's relationship with God in a new light. God looks at the heart and rewards each according to their works. So the new covenant (31.31-34) expresses a new start, a new relationship with God, the Law will no longer be written on tablets of stone but within the hearts of the people of Israel. Jeremiah died a failure, a fugitive in Egypt, but his teachings grew in importance in helping to shape the future of Israel. The reading, 20.7-9, comes from the 'Confessions' of Jeremiah, words of the prophet himself. The reading begins with Jeremiah speaking to God saying God is stronger than he and he seems to see God being responsible for his misfortunes. He is a laughing-stock and declares that God's word, which he proclaims, has brought him nothing but insult and derision. Jeremiah wants to give up his work but the fire of love for God burning in his heart would not let him. The reading goes on to speak of Jeremiah's enemies plotting against him but for Jeremiah 'Yahweh is at my side like a mighty hero.' If you have time read the whole of this section 20.7-18. This wonderful passage prepares the way for the gospel where the Christ, for whom Jeremiah prepared, will have to endure suffering to fulfil the Father's will.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 62.2-6,8-9, is a psalm of king David when he is wandering in the desert pining for the presence of God in his sanctuary. Today it is applied as a response to the plight of Jeremiah in the first reading, 'O God, you are my God, for you I long.' The psalmist goes on to speak of the longing to be in God's presence for his love is better than life and the psalm continues with thoughts of praise for God and God's response.

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, 12.1-2, is the beginning of a new section, an exhortation on Christian living where Paul teaches about humility and charity which includes charity to everyone, including our enemies and respect for the civil law. To achieve this end Paul begins, remembering God's mercies, by teaching that we should offer our bodies as acceptable sacrifices. The Christian community are members of Christ who has become in his crucified and risen body the dwelling-place of a new presence of God and a new form of worship. In place of modelling ourselves on the modern world we must transform our minds so that we can discern what is God's will for us and come to live lives that are good, acceptable and mature. This reading fits in well with the other readings today.