

THE TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – A

The gospel reading teaches about fraternal correction and what should be done if a solution to the problem cannot be found. The first reading in a similar vein tells of the duty of the prophet when forewarned by God. In the second reading Paul teaches that 'love is the fulfilment of the Law.'

The **First Reading** is from the prophet Ezekiel, one of the major prophets of Israel. It is thought his whole ministry was among the exiles in Babylon. The Exile lasted from 587 to 538 B.C. Called by God to maintain the faith of the Israelites during this traumatic period of Jewish history, Ezekiel's entire teaching centres on inner conversion: we must achieve a new heart and a new spirit, see Ezk.36.26. The Temple was his ruling interest and he holds the Law in veneration. Ezekiel is primarily a visionary, his four visions occupy a substantial part of the book. The Messiah is not to be a king but a shepherd who will look for individual rather than collective reparation. The book is divided into four parts: 1. Threats and reproaches addressed to the Israelites before the siege of Jerusalem. 2. Proclamations against the nations. 3. Comfort during and after the siege of Jerusalem. 4. Provisions for a new political and religious constitution after the Exile.

The reading, 33.7-9, is from the third section of the prophecy headed 'During and after the siege of Jerusalem.' Here the prophet is given the mission of a watchman. The prophet must listen to the word coming from God's mouth and act upon it. In the example given God gives a warning and the prophet must pass on the warning. If the prophet fails in his duty he will be held responsible for the outcome whatever it may be. If the prophet does act on the warning of God then the prophet will be safe.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 94.1-2,6-9, is a processional hymn perhaps recited at the feast of Shelters (wine and olive harvest). It is also the psalm prayed by the Church at the opening of her daily prayer. 'The rock' in the first verse is an allusion to the rock from which water flowed in the desert when the Israelites with hardened hearts challenged God at Massah and Meribah. This psalm encourages us to have a confident attitude towards God.

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, 13.8-10, teaches about love and the Law. Paul has just been teaching about submission to civil authority and paying what is owed like taxes and tolls. This naturally leads Paul on to say 'the only thing you should owe to anyone is love for one another.' Paul then says 'for to love the other person is to fulfil the law.' He then mentions several of the Ten Commandments and that all these commandments are summed up in the second great commandment of loving your neighbour as yourself. Paul's conclusion is: 'love is the fulfilment of the Law.' Read from the beginning of the chapter if you have time.