

THE TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - C

On this Sunday we have three well-known parables from Luke's gospel teaching us how God welcomes home the sinner. In the first reading we listen to Moses pleading for the people who in the desert have become impatient for his return and God says, 'my wrath shall blaze out against them and devour them.' In the second reading Paul writes to his disciple Timothy telling him that he, Paul, is a good example of what God can achieve with a sinful man.

The **First Reading** is from the book of Exodus, the second book in the Bible and the second book of the Law. This book has two main themes: the birth and call of Moses with the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt and then the Covenant God made with the Israelites at Mt Sinai through Moses and the laws which flow from the Covenant itself. The two are connected by the journey through the desert. Like the book of Genesis, Exodus is a compilation of three earlier documents and chapter 32 from which our reading comes combines the Yahwistic and Elohist traditions.

The reading, 32.7-11,13-14, is from the fifth section of the book. Moses has spent 'a long time' speaking with God and the Israelites left at the foot of Mountain under Aaron's direction have become impatient and fashion themselves the golden calf which was not an image of God rather the footstall of an unseen deity. God can see what they have done and forewarns Moses as he returns from the Mountain, here the reading begins. They have forgotten already the Covenant God made with them and seem to be turning to pagan gods and the Lord seems intent on punishing his people. But Moses pleads with 'the Lord his God' and reminds God of the promises he made long ago through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Lord relents. We may find it strange compared with the gospel reading that God is portrayed in an angry mood not ready to forgive. We must remember these are the very early days of God revealing himself to his chosen people and God is shown to act as human beings would expect him to act. The gospel reading shows us how far God's self-revelation has come. It had to be a gradual process.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 50.3-4,12-13,17,19, is the well-known penitential psalm the Miserere. This psalm is used as a reflection on the first reading and for us seeking God's forgiveness for the times we have put God into second or third place in our desire for earthly position or wealth. In the opening verse we look to God's mercy for he alone can 'wash me thoroughly from my guilt.' In the second verse it is God who creates and brings into being something new and wonderful, 'a resolute spirit.' The third verse starts with the words used by the Church at the beginning of her daily prayer and concludes with the humble contrite heart being acceptable to God.

The **Second Reading** comes from Paul's first letter to Timothy. The letters 1 Timothy, Titus, 2 Timothy are known as the Pastoral Epistles, letters from Paul to his most loyal disciples giving them instruction and advice about the organisation and government of the communities which he had entrusted to their care. 1Tim and Titus may have been written from Ephesus c.65 AD and 2 Tim before Paul's death in 67AD. There is much uncertainty about the authorship of the letters because the thought and language in the letters has changed along with Paul's central Christological teaching and method of arguing, also the dating of the letters which some hold were written by a follower of Paul who, after Paul's death, attributed the letters to his hand a literary convention of the time. They must have been written if this is the case soon after Paul's death because the ecclesiastical hierarchy which developed after the death of the apostles is in a stage of evolution in these letters.

The reading, 1.12-17, comes near the opening of the letter. Having spoken about the suppression of false teachers and the purpose of the Law Paul next speaks of his own calling which is today's reading. Paul begins by thanking God 'who has given me strength. By calling me into his service he has judged me trustworthy.' Paul recognizes what he owes to God because 'while I lacked faith I acted in ignorance.' He is here referring to the time before his conversion and then asserts that 'Jesus came into the world to save sinners.' Paul says he was the greatest of sinners and Christ made him 'the leading example of his inexhaustible patience' which we may note seems to be lacking in the first reading, the progress of revelation. The reading ends with a doxology, a prayer of praise.