

THE TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – A

The gospel reading teaches us the necessity of forgiveness as Jesus tells Peter we must be prepared to forgive 'Not seven, I tell you, but seventy-seven times,' that is we must be prepared to forgive every time. Jesus then tells parable to illustrate his teaching. Similarly in the first reading we must not bear resentment against a brother or sister. The second reading in a way compliments the other readings teaching us whether alive or dead we belong to the Lord who is a forgiving God.

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, 27.30-28.7, teaches about resentment and in line with the gospel reading about forgiveness, says we should not harbour resentment against a brother or sister because this is sinful and the Lord is aware of our sin. Pardon is the way forward and we will have our sins forgiven. If we cannot forgive can we expect forgiveness from God? We are told to 'remember the last things' which could bring 'corruption and death.' So we must 'stop hating....and be faithful to the commandments' of God. We must remember what God has promised us and ignore any offence. If you have time read the gospel reading for today.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 102.1-4,9-12, is a psalm of God's love for us. We begin by giving thanks and blessing God's name because he forgives and heals all our ills. God will not be angry forever because he loves us and will not judge us according to our faults. His love is stronger than the powers of nature, his forgiveness removes all our sins from our sight, a psalm which faithfully enables us to think on the teaching in the first reading.

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, 14.7-9, comes from the exhortation towards the end of the letter. Paul is encouraging charity towards the scrupulous. We must welcome anyone whose faith is not strong. Paul gives the example of one person who 'thinks some days are holier than others and another thinks them all equal' and again one person will eat any kind of food while someone of a scrupulous nature will only eat vegetables; whether we eat all foods or only some we do so, says Paul, to honour the Lord then come our reading, 'while we are alive, we are living for the Lord and when we die, we die for the Lord; and so alive or dead we belong to the Lord: and so, alive or dead, we belong to the Lord.' These few verses taken out of context rob them of some of their meaning. What Paul is teaching is that observance of dietary laws and the rest are only one way of honouring the Lord in whom we live and move and have our being.