

THE TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – A

The gospel reading of the parable of the labourers in the vineyard teaches us not to expect a greater reward from God because we have lived out the gospel teaching more fervently than others. God's generosity to the sinner cannot be overlooked. In the first reading we learn that God is rich in forgiving for his ways are quite different from our ways. In the second reading we begin Paul's letter to the Philippians. Paul longs to be with Christ but he prepared to forgo this for a time because 'for me to stay alive in this body is a more urgent need for your sake.'

The **First Reading** comes from the prophet Isaiah. He was a major prophet in Israel but the book which bears his name is not all his work. The reading today comes from the second part of the book, chs.40-55 (Second Isaiah), which deals with a period of Jewish history 200 years after Isaiah's day when Jerusalem has fallen and the nation is in exile in Babylon. Cyrus, the instrument of God, is about to come and overpower the Babylonian Empire and be the means by which the Israelites are able to return, a new Exodus. Embedded in the book are four passages called the 'Songs of the Servant of Yahweh.' They depict a perfect servant of God who is the light of the nations and gathers in God's people. He is one who preaches the true faith who expiates people's sins by his own death and is glorified by God. This part of the book, in contrast with the first part which is for the most part threatening, is far more consoling as the opening words announce: "'Console my people, console them,' says your God."

The reading, 55.6-9, is from an invitation to participate in the benefits of the new covenant (see 55.3b and Jeremiah 31-34) and to be converted while there is still time. The reading begins, 'Seek the lord while he is still to be found, call on him while he is still near.' The sinful are encouraged to give up their evil thoughts and actions and turn back to God because he is rich in forgiveness. Verses 8 & 9 echo very much our thoughts at the conclusion of the gospel reading for there the men who have worked all day and borne the midday heat receive the same wage (from God) as those who have only worked an hour or two. God's ways are not our ways. God is just to those who came first and generous to those who came last. Why should we moan at God's generosity? If you have time read the whole of chapter 55.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 144.2-3,8-9,17-18, is an alphabetical psalm in praise of God as king. God is great and worthy of our praise because he is full of compassion, a God who is kind to his creatures, just and close to all those who call on him from their hearts.

The **Second Reading** is from Paul's letter to the Philippians. Philippi, one of the principal cities of Macedonia, had been evangelized by Paul in 50 A.D. on his second missionary journey. Paul is now on his third missionary journey and is imprisoned in Ephesus, the capital of Roman Asia. He hopes to revisit the Church at Philippi and while in prison he writes to them a friendly letter, giving some news to his converts there. He warns them to 'Beware of evil workmen!' who will destroy the unity of love and joy which he so much desires for them based on humility, the humility of Christ and to that end he gives the Philippians a poem on the humility of the Messiah. This poem, 2.5-11, may or may not be from Paul's pen, but it gives witness to early Christian understanding of the nature of Christ.

The reading, 1.20-24,27, is taken from the introduction to the letter where Paul is writing about the circumstances of his own life. He is in prison, in chains which he has to wear for the sake of the gospel and rather than hindering the advance of the gospel it has encouraged others to proclaim the gospel since he cannot, although Paul says that some are doing it out of rivalry and competition but others out of love. Whatever Christ is being proclaimed and for that Paul is happy. He continues 'in accordance with my most confident hope and trust...but with complete fearlessness I shall go on, so that now, as always, (and here the reading begins) Christ will be glorified in my body, whether by my life or by my death.' By his baptism and reception of the Eucharist Paul is closely united to Christ, his own life, sufferings and death can be attributed mystically to Christ living in him and being glorified in him. For Paul life is Christ and so death for him would be a gain, a way of being with Christ. If however Paul can achieve fruitful work for Christ by staying alive which should he choose? Though he longs to be with Christ he realises the Philippians' need for him to stay alive. Paul concludes by saying they 'must always behave in a way that is worthy of the gospel of Christ.' If you have time read from chapter 1.12 to get a clearer understanding of the reading.