

THE TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - C

On this Sunday we listen to another of Luke's parables, the story of the rich man and Lazarus, which teaches about the folly of riches and how they can distract us from fulfilling the gospel precept to love our neighbour. In the first reading Amos warns the rich in Israel and the punishments that will ensue if there is no change of heart. In the second reading Paul encourages Timothy to do all he has been told 'with no faults or failures until the Appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

The **First Reading** is from the prophet Amos, one of twelve minor prophets whose words are recorded in the Bible. A sheep farmer in the Judean desert, he was called by God to prophesy in Israel. He preached during the reign of Jeroboam II, 783-743, during which the Northern Kingdom grew wealthy, the poor were exploited, and the spectacular liturgy at the Bethel shrine lacked true worship of God. Amos preached at this schismatic shrine and also in Samaria. He was very direct in his approach and in the name of God he condemned corrupt city life, social injustice and deceitful liturgies. For Amos Yahweh, the God of Israel, was sovereign Lord of all the world, and Yahweh's Day would come when Israel would suffer God's vengeance at the hands of the Assyrians. Yet all is not lost, Amos looks forward to the salvation of the House of Joseph. His profound belief in an all-powerful and universal Lord he teaches without any hesitation. He looks for an Israel whose belief and worship of God are what was promised to God in the beginning, pure Yahwism. Like all the prophets his teaching was rejected, he was expelled and he returned to his sheep.

The reading, 6.1,4-7, is part of a long section of warnings and threats to Israel, the Northern Kingdom. The warnings were against those who worshipped false gods at the Bethel shrine and against those who were self-indulgent in their luxury which gave them a false sense of security. The reading begins with a warning against those 'so comfortable in Zion.' Zion refers to Jerusalem which seems out of place because Jerusalem is in Judaea not the Northern Kingdom, it is thought this is a Judaeian adjustment to the text. The second line is geographically correct, those who feel secure on the mountains of Samaria; for these people disaster awaits. The reading goes on to describe their luxurious living but 'about the ruin of Joseph they do not care at all.' Joseph represents all those northern tribes about to face destruction at the hands of the Assyrians. The reading concludes on a sad note these defeated tribes 'will be the first to be exiled; the sprawlers' revelry over.' As we know from history although Amos was ignored and sent back to Judaea his words proved to be true.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 145.6-10, is a hymn to the God of help, recited by the Jews in the morning. The psalmist reminds us that God is ever faithful and is just to the oppressed, he then goes on to give examples of God's justice, he gives bread to the hungry, he sets prisoners free and the rest of the prayer is a litany of God's good deeds to mankind. We need have no fear this God will reign forever.

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 governing of the communities which he had entrusted to their care. Both 1Tim and Titus seem to have been written from Ephesus c.65 AD and 2 Tim before Paul's death in 67AD. However there is much uncertainty about the authorship and dating of the letters and some hold the letters were written by a follower of Paul after his death and he has attributed the letters to Paul's 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.

In this reading, 6.11-16, Paul continues to give advice to Timothy he must be 'saintly and religious, filled with faith and love, patient and gentle.' Then Paul says Timothy must fight to give witness to the truth and so gain eternal life. Timothy must continue faultlessly before God and before Jesus Christ who gave witness before Pontius Pilate 'until the Appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.' The reading concludes with an impressive doxology, a hymn of praise to God. The main theme is that God is the only object of worship and that no one can claim to fathom the mystery of God.