

THE TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - C

In today's gospel reading we have an example of the power of faith, remember the woman in the crowd who came up behind Jesus saying to herself: 'If only I can touch his cloak I shall be saved.' The teaching which follows is about humble service. This human way of doing things must be contrasted with, for example, Jesus washing the disciples' feet at the Last Supper and the teaching which follows. The first reading is from a little known prophet, Habakkuk, he is complaining that the Lord will not listen and in the second part of the reading the Lord gives his answer. In the second reading we continue with Paul's advice to his disciple Timothy he must never be ashamed of witnessing to the Lord.

The **First Reading** is from the short book of the prophet Habakkuk. Written between 605 BC and the first siege of Jerusalem in 597BC, the book opens with a dialogue between the prophet and his God, the second part has five imprecations calling down curses on the oppressors of the Judaeans, the final section is a plea to Yahweh for deliverance from their oppressors. The prophet sounds a new note in the teaching of the prophets he demands an account from God for his actions. Judah has sinned against God but why should a God of holiness allow the savage Chaldeans to wreak his vengeance? Why must the bad be punished by those who are worse? Why must God appear to strengthen the arm of injustice? A question for us today! The answer given is that in paradoxical ways Almighty God prepares the final triumph of uprightness; trusting in God, the life of the upright will be secure.

The reading, 1.2-3,2.2-4, is in two parts the first deals with the prophet speaking words of complaint to his God. He is referring to the tyranny of the Chaldeans who are about to lay siege to Jerusalem. Habakkuk wants to know why the saving justice and kindness of Yahweh allow the idolatrous to triumph. Habakkuk wants an answer. In the second part Habakkuk receives in the form of a vision an answer which he is told to write down. 'The vision is for its appointed time' and Yahweh's command for it to be written down is Yahweh's pledge to fulfill the vision, 'it hastens towards its end and it will not lie; although it may take some time, wait for it, for come it certainly will before too long.' The last two lines give the message and for us it is the last line 'the upright will live through faithfulness' which give a teaching with universal application. Being faithful to God, to his word and to his will, is characteristic of the upright and assures him of life here on earth. This refers to the people of Judah while the Chaldeans 'whose heart is not upright' will perish.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 94.1-2,6-9, is, as the first line indicates, an invitation to praise and is used by the Church every day at the beginning of her prayer. 'The rock' in the second line is an allusion to the rock in the desert that yielded water. The second verse gives reason why we should listen to God's voice which is the prayer of the third verse our hearts mustn't be hardened and become deaf to God's word.

The **Second Reading** comes from Paul's Second Letter to Timothy. Probably Paul's last letter written in prison in Rome asking Timothy again, "Do your best to come and see me as soon as you can" because he knows he will not get out of prison alive, "the time has come for me to be gone; I have fought the good fight to the end." Timothy was a convert of Paul's, a constant companion on Paul's missionary journeys. Under Paul's direction Timothy is caring for the churches in Asia, present day Turkey, and he must deal with some heretics who taught that God was completely unattainable and that Christ should be worshipped as the highest of the angels. Paul taught against this heretical teaching in his letter to the Colossians and now urges Timothy to remain loyal to the Apostolic doctrine he had received and to hand it on to worthy and carefully chosen successors.

The reading, 1.6-8,13-14, continues the advice given in the first letter. Timothy is encouraged 'to fan into a flame the gift that God gave you,' he is not to be timid in witnessing to the faith but have 'the Spirit of power, and love, and self-control.' Timothy must never be ashamed of the Lord or of Paul, the Lord's prisoner, but rely on 'the power of God.' The reading concludes with Paul encouraging Timothy who has been put in charge of the Church in Asia (Turkey) to look after it as if it were a precious stone and 'guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit.' We see here the pastoral care of the Church being handed on to the second generation.