

THE TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - C

On this Sunday we listen to the lovely story of the ten lepers being healed by Jesus because of their faith in him, but Jesus is saddened because only one returns to give him thanks. In the first reading we also listen to the healing of a leper who also returned to give thanks to God's prophet. In the second reading we continue to listen to Paul's advice to Timothy.

The **First Reading** is from the second book of Kings, one of the historical books of the Bible. Books 1 and 2 Kings are a continuation from books 1 and 2 Samuel, indeed the first two chapters of 1 Kings which deal with the death of king David, are the concluding chapters of 2 Samuel 9-20. The two books of Kings deal with the reign of Solomon, 1 Kings 3-11, his wisdom, his riches, his building programme including the Temple. It was an age of peace but also of exploitation which aggravated the existing hostility between Judah, in the south, and the northern tribes, Israel. On Solomon's death his kingdom split in two and to the political secession of the northern tribes was added religious schism. This was a period of fraternal strife and attacks from outside; Egypt attacked Judah and the Aramaeans (Syria) attacked the northern tribes. This was only a prelude to the fall of Samaria, capital of the North, to the Assyrians in 721 and the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonian king in 587, followed by Exile. Woven in among these accounts are the Elijah and Elisha cycles, the two great prophets of the period who had much to say about the religious conduct of the kings of the North. After the political division the kings of Israel are all judged guilty of abandoning Temple sacrifice and erecting a shrine of their own at Bethel, and only two kings of Judah receive fulsome praise. All this ran contrary to the teaching of Deuteronomy that the Temple in Jerusalem alone was the place for sacrifice and that the nation will be blessed only if it respects God's covenant and it will be punished if it does not.

The reading, 5.14-17, is a short section from the much longer story of Naaman, 5.1-19 and by extension on to the end of the chapter, verse 27, it is worth reading the whole chapter. From the reading we could get the impression that Naaman was not happy to bathe seven times in the Jordan but he had to be persuaded to do so by his servant, he considered the waters in his own land to be 'better than any water in Israel.' Once healed Naaman wants to pay for the healing service but Elisha refuses but does allow the man to show honour to God by taking soil from Israel on which Naaman can offer 'holocaust or sacrifice' to the Lord.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 97.1-4, is an eschatological psalm inspired by the closing chapter of the prophet Isaiah expressing the hope of the Israelite people and finally of 'every nation and every language.' In the psalm we have hope of salvation expressed in every verse and this hope is for 'the house of Israel' and it extends to the ends of the earth. It is a reflection on the first reading in which God's salvation comes to a non-Jewish person, Naaman.

The **Second Reading** comes from Paul's Second Letter to Timothy. Probably Paul's last letter written in prison in Rome while Timothy must, "Do your best to come and see me as soon as you can" because Paul 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 is having to 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.

In the reading, 2.8-13, Paul is instructing Timothy on how he should face hardships. In the first part of the reading Paul portrays himself as a carrier of the Good News and because he carries this Good News he has hardships to bear 'even to being chained like a criminal' but he takes consolation in the fact that 'they cannot chain up God's news.' Paul perseveres in his suffering for all those who are to be saved and brought into God's glory. This must be Timothy's attitude. The second part of the reading is in the form of an early Christian hymn, the conditional phrase which begins the line, 'If we have died with him', has a very positive response, 'then we shall live with him' and so on to the end of the hymn. Paul uses the words of the hymn to advise Timothy.