

THE TWENTY- NINTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - C

In his gospel Luke frequently shows Jesus at prayer 'he would always go off to some deserted place and pray.' This Sunday the teaching we receive is about praying without giving up because our prayer is not immediately answered. The gospel tells the story of a woman who kept badgering a judge for justice against her enemy. Jesus tells us to follow the woman's example, 'will not God see justice done to his chosen who cry to him day and night even when he delays to help them?' In the first reading we hear how Moses had to keep his arms raised to ensure the Israelites victory over their enemies. In the second reading we continue to listen to Paul's advice to Timothy and we have one of the classic texts from Paul with regard to the value and importance of Scripture.

The **First Reading** is from the book of Exodus, the second book in the Bible and the second book of the Law. This book has two main themes: the birth and call of Moses and the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt and then the Covenant God made with the Israelites at Mt Sinai through Moses and the laws which flow from the Covenant itself, the two are connected by the journey through the desert. Like the book of Genesis, Exodus is a compilation of three earlier documents and our reading today comes from the Yahwistic tradition. This tradition has a lively and vivid style and although God is described in human terms the author has a deep sense of the divine.

The reading, 17.8-13, comes from the section where the Israelites are making their journey from Egypt to Mt Sinai and gives an account of Moses on a hilltop while the Israelites engage the Amalekites in battle. As the Israelites march out to battle Moses, Aaron and Hur climb to the hilltop. 'As long as Moses kept his arms raised, Israel had the advantage; when he let his arms fall the advantage went to Amalek.' To ensure victory Aaron and Hur found stones to support Moses' arms and the Israelites gained victory. The story is not about prayer itself but about Moses' persistence in keeping his arms raised, it is this kind of persistence that we must have in our prayer to gain victory.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 120, is one of the Songs of Ascent sung by pilgrims on their way up to Jerusalem to celebrate a festival. The psalm is about God the guardian of Israel. In the minds of the Israelites the mountains were very much associated with God, Moses climbed Sinai, Elijah mount Horeb and in the NT the disciples see Jesus clothed in divine glory on a mountain top. Our help says the psalmist comes from God who made the mountains he is our guardian and prevents us stumbling.

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.

The reading, 3.14-4.2, begins with Paul urging Timothy to keep to what he knows to be true, the teaching he has received based on the Jewish Scriptures which Timothy has known since he was a child. The Scriptures teach wisdom that leads to faith and hence salvation. Then we get this classic statement by Paul beginning with 'All scripture is inspired by God...' Paul then goes on to say Scripture can be used 'for teaching, for refuting error, for guiding peoples' lives and teaching them to be holy.' Paul concludes saying 'This is how someone dedicated to God becomes fully equipped and ready for any good work,' stirring words from Paul. His final advice to Timothy brings the reading to a close. The message of Christ must be proclaimed whether it is welcome or not 'Insist on it. Refute falsehood, correct error, call to obedience.' That is obedience to the message of Christ, words which ring so true for us today. Patience is needed with the intention of teaching, not trying to have a religious argument or score points that is not what Christ sent us to do, rather to teach his message in the most suitable and acceptable way.