

THE THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – A

In the gospel reading Jesus addresses the people and his disciples telling them that, 'The scribes and Pharisees occupy the chair of Moses' and Moses was the teacher *par excellence* in Israel. So Jesus instructs the people and disciples to 'do what they tell you and listen to what they say.' However Jesus goes on to say 'do not be guided by what they do; since they do not practice what they preach.' The reading goes on to expand on what Jesus has said. In the first reading the Lord through the mouth of the prophet Malachi says to the priests, 'You yourselves have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to lapse by your teaching.' In the second reading Paul continues to tell the Thessalonians that 'we felt so devoted to you' because as soon as they heard the word 'you welcomed it for what it really is.'

The **First Reading** is from the prophet Malachi. The book is probably anonymous since the title 'Malachi' means messenger and was possibly taken from 3.1. The book is composed of six passages similar in construction: God or his prophet makes a statement which is disputed by priest or people and then developed into a discourse which contains threat or promise of salvation. There are two main themes: the failure of priests and people in their duties; the scandal of mixed marriage and divorce. The prophet foretells the Day of Yahweh which will purify the priesthood, consume the wicked and secure triumph for the upright. The book was written about 450BC. The enthusiasm aroused by earlier prophets following the return from exile has waned and the community is drifting. Malachi awaits the advent of the Angel of the Covenant heralded by a mysterious messenger, John the Baptist, and in the following messianic era moral order and true religion will be restored and a perfect sacrifice offered to God by all nations.

The reading, 1.14-2.2,8-10, comes from the passage entitled 'An indictment of the priests' and we have an extract from this passage for our reading which begins by saying, 'For I am a great king, says Yahweh Sabaoth, and among the nations my name inspires awe.' Having set out the position of God the reading then goes on to decry the behaviour of the priests, they will not listen and glorify God's name so God places a curse on them. Further they have broken the covenant so God has made them 'contemptible and vile to the whole people.' The reading ends with God distraught, 'Is there not one Father of us all? Did not one God create us? Why, then, do we break faith with one another profaning the covenant of our ancestors? Read the whole passage, from 1.6-2.10, if you have time.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 130, is a prayer of childlike trust. The soul at peace abandons itself to God laying aside anxiety and ambition. Like Israel we must hope in the Lord 'hence forth and for ever.'

The **Second Reading** comes from the first letter of St Paul to the Thessalonians. Paul founded the Church in Thessalonica on his 2nd missionary journey in the summer of the year 50. He wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians in the winter of 50/51, some of his earliest writing. In the opening chapters Paul writes very affectionately to his converts now undergoing persecution. In the latter part of the letter he gives some practical suggestions including answers to questions about what happens to people when they die and about Christ's Second Coming (the Parousia). This letter along with the second one are important because they give us Paul's teaching about the end of time and also give us Paul's thinking at this time which was, how did Christ's Resurrection from the dead and his Second Coming bring salvation to his converts whether alive or dead?

The reading, 2.7-9,13, has Paul continuing to show his affection for the Thessalonians so that he says 'we would have been happy to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, so dear had you become.' Paul reminds them he continued to earn his own keep while he was among them preaching the word so as not to be a burden to them. He finally says he thanks God for them for having received the Good News, they welcome it for what it really is 'God's word, a power that is working among you believers.' This section can be seen as a summary of the apostolic tradition i.e. the message is first 'received' or 'heard,' it then penetrates the mind or heart where it is welcomed; it proves that the hearer acknowledges that God has been speaking through his missionary. Read if you have time from the beginning of chapter 2 down to verse 14.