

THE THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - C

This is the penultimate Sunday of the Church's year and she leads us to think about the last things, the end of time as expressed in the synoptic gospels. Luke's account which follows Mark is set in the Temple and he merges his account of the destruction of the Temple with the end of time and the final coming of Christ in glory (not part of our reading). To hear the whole teaching we need to read on to the end of the chapter. The first reading gives a warning from the prophet Malachi about what will happen at the end of time. The second reading ties in with the thought in the other two readings. Paul says he always worked to be able to support himself and speaks out against those who refuse to work and interfere with other people's work.

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, 3.19-20, comes from the passage which teaches about the triumph of the Day of Yahweh. Just prior to the reading Yahweh says of some: 'You have said harsh things about me' while of others who feared God: 'Yahweh took note and listened...they will be my prized possession.' Then comes judgement which is our reading. For 'all the proud and all evil-doers' will suffer punishment in a fire described more completely in Isaiah 10.16f and also mentioned in other prophets, but for those who fear God's name 'the Sun of justice will rise with healing rays' which will trample down the wicked.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, 97.5-9, is a hymn to the judge of the world, a reflection on the first reading. The prayer begins by requesting music in God's honour, and then a fanfare on trumpet and horn, usually reserved for the accession of a new king, but here for the enthronement of Yahweh, the judge. There follows a cosmic fanfare as the whole of nature proclaims God their judge who will judge the world with saving justice.

The **Second Reading** comes from the second 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 first one are important because they give us Paul's teaching about the end of time and also 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, 3.7-12, comes towards the end of the letter where Paul is speaking against idleness and dishonesty. Paul has warned the Thessalonians to 'keep away from any of the brothers who lives an undisciplined life' which leads Paul to say at the beginning of the reading 'you know how you are supposed to imitate us' because in imitating Paul they will be imitating Christ because Paul imitates Christ in his life. Paul then goes on to show he has not been work shy. Paul always paid his way because he did not want to be a burden on any of the brethren. He then goes on to speak of those who are refusing to work, they are living in idleness and interfering in other people's work. Paul message is simple to these people they must 'go on quietly working and earning the food that they eat.' Idleness had no part in Paul's character.

