

## THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT – C

With this Sunday we begin a new liturgical year and we read from the gospel according to Luke. Advent is a time of preparation for the coming of the Lord. He came once in historical time and we celebrate that coming at Christmas but there will be a second coming for which we have to prepare and we think about that second coming in today's gospel reading. Luke presents us with Daniel's vision of 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory,' he says we must stand with confidence our heads held high because our liberation is close at hand. The first reading tells of the messianic community living in the safety of the heavenly Jerusalem. In the second reading Paul urges the Thessalonians to live in love so that they may be blameless 'when our Lord Jesus Christ comes.'

The **First Reading** is from the prophet Jeremiah, one of the major prophets in Israel. He was called by God as a young man in the reign of Josiah, a good king of Judah when there were hopes for reform and a return to Godly ways. Josiah was killed in battle in 609 and with the rise of the Chaldean empire, king Nebuchadnezzar imposed his rule on Judah who sought support from Egypt. They revolted twice, in 597 and 587, which resulted in the capture and destruction of the Temple and the city, many of its inhabitants being carried off into slavery to Babylon. Jeremiah lived and worked in these final traumatic days, preaching, issuing threats of God's anger and foretelling the final disaster. He suffered greatly not only from those who considered him a defeatist because he was opposed to war as a solution to Judah's problems but also from his own inner conflicts. A man of peace he had to fight against the whole population from kings and priests to false prophets and the whole nation. He was a Job-like figure inwardly tortured by the work God had given him to do, but all this helped to purify his soul and he saw Israel's relationship with God in a new light. God looks at the heart and rewards each according to their works. So the new covenant (31.31-34) expresses a new start, a new relationship with God, the Law will no longer be written on tablets of stone but within the hearts of the people of Israel. Jeremiah died a failure, a fugitive in Egypt, but his teachings grew in importance in helping to shape the future of Israel.

The reading, 33.14-16, comes after the announcement of the new covenant and is part of the Book of Consolation where Israel is promised recovery after exile. The reading describes the administration of the messianic community which fulfils the Lord's promise to the houses of Judah and Israel. David the great king whose descendant will be the Christ is the 'virtuous Branch' spoken of in our reading. 'In those days' refers to life in the messianic kingdom when honesty and integrity will be practiced, Judah and Israel will be saved and their city called 'The Lord-our-integrity' is another name for the heavenly Jerusalem. The reading is referring to life in God's kingdom where all will be safe.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 24.4-5,8-9,10,14, is another alphabetical psalm, a prayer in time of danger, the danger for us being that we lose life in God's kingdom. The words of the first verse reflect this. We need to know how to walk in God's truth. The second verse continues along the same theme but tells us that it is the humble poor who receive God's word. Finally we must keep God's covenant and will and by revering him God will reveal more clearly his way for us.

The **Second Reading** comes from the first letter of St Paul to the Thessalonians. Paul founded the Church in Thessalonica on his 2<sup>nd</sup> 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, 3.12-4.2, is a response by Paul to the Thessalonians for the good reports he has received from Timothy whom Paul had sent to Thessalonica when Paul himself was unable to go there. The reading begins with Paul praying that the Thessalonians may have an increase of love for each other and this is only the beginning of charity, their love must extend to the whole human race so that they may lead blameless lives until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. Paul urges the Thessalonians again to carry on leading the kind of life that God wants them to lead never forgetting the instruction he gave them in the beginning. We must ask ourselves whether we are leading the kind of life God wants us to lead.