

Solemnity: OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THE KING OF THE UNIVERSE - B

This is the last Sunday of the Church's liturgical year. The gospel reading takes us into the passion of our Lord specifically part of Jesus' interrogation before Pilate. Jesus declares openly that he is a king with a kingdom, he was born for this he came into the world for this: to bear witness to the truth. The first reading is from the prophet Daniel, in his vision Daniel sees the culmination of the work of the son of man. The second reading speaks of the tremendous calling we have received as Christians.

The **First Reading** is from the prophet Daniel. This is one of the prophetic books in the Bible coming after Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel and before the twelve minor prophets. The book falls into two main parts, the first, chapters 1-6, is the narratives of Daniel and his companions' trials in which their reputation and even their lives are at stake. Daniel and his companions emerge victorious and their persecutors glorify God for having saved them. The action takes place apparently in Babylon in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, his son and his son's successor. The second half of the book relates to visions granted to Daniel. The author is writing (167-164 BC) a long time after the events recorded and has made use of oral and written traditions still current in his own time and he has made the hero of these pious tales a certain Daniel. The aim of the book is to sustain the faith and hope among the Jews during persecution in the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes (175-163 BC). Daniel and his companions had suffered similarly although this present persecutor is painted in very dark colours, but he will be destroyed and the kingdom of the Saints, ruled over by the Son of Man, will be realised (ch.7). The revelation in the book concerns the hidden plan of God who controls times and seasons for his people and the nations. The book is not truly part of the prophetic tradition, it has affinities with wisdom literature in the first part and apocalyptic literature in the second part, the Apocalypse is its NT counterpart.

The reading, 7.13-14, is the first of Daniel's visions. The vision is of four beasts, four kingdoms which will come to power, one king of the fourth kingdom being particularly savage towards the chosen people, Antiochus Epiphanes. Then the scene changes to the court of heaven with one most venerable sitting on his seat, the court is in session. The beast representing Antiochus Epiphanes because of his boasting is put to death. The writer continues: 'I was gazing into the visions of the night,' the beginning of our reading and Daniel sees the son of man coming on the clouds of heaven, he is brought into the presence of the one of great age and all authority is given to him to rule for ever. The son of man is thought to represent an individual or may represent the holy ones of God. Jesus uses the title of himself and it is thought to be messianic, the son of man being the leader, representative and exemplar of the holy ones of the Most High. For us today we think of Christ coming at the end of time when all will be gathered into his kingdom under his kingship. (Read Daniel ch.7 if you have time.)

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 92.1-2,5, is a psalm praising the majesty of God. The sovereignty of God is shown by the laws he imposes on the universe and the Law he has given to men. God's throne spoken of in the second verse is in the heavens which are God's palace. The decrees of the third verse are God's revealed Law, unchangeable as the universe itself and the basis of God's absolute sovereignty over Israel and all creation. Hence Jesus words to Pilate: 'My kingdom is not of this world.'

The **Second Reading** is from the Book of the Apocalypse (Greek) or Revelation (English). It is a revelation of hidden things, particularly of hidden events in the future. The authors of apocalyptic writings may be considered the successors of the prophets who heard the Word of God and passed it on by word of mouth, whereas apocalyptic writers were given revelation in a dream and passed it on in writing. The language of this writing is richly symbolic and the importance of the visions which are described is never in their immediate literal meaning. The imagery must be appreciated at its true value and we must do our best to translate the symbols back into the ideas which the author intended them to convey. This type of writing became very popular in the two centuries before Christ, the visions of Ezekiel and Zechariah paving the way, and was fully developed by 165 BC when the book of Daniel was written. The authorship was attributed to John, the apostle, by writers in the West, while those in the East did not hold this view. The book is dated about 95 AD with parts written at the end of the sixties AD. The book is first and foremost a tract for the times, a period of disturbance and bitter persecution, to increase the hope and determination of the infant Church. This hope is based on the belief in the great 'Day of Yahweh' spoken of by the prophet Amos 5.18. The 'Day' is coming soon when God will liberate his people from their oppressors. When John wrote the Church had been decimated by persecution, Rome and its empire (The Beast) was only a tool wielded by Satan. The book portrays the basic realities on which faith relies in any period of history; God's promise to be with his people. It is this presence that has now been perfected by the marriage of God and his new chosen people in the person of his Son, Immanuel (God-with-us). The promise of the risen Christ, 'I am with you always; yes, to the end of time,' is what gives life to the Church.

The reading, 1.5-8, is from the opening verses of the book. It opens with the statement that having risen from the dead Jesus is the faithful witness and Ruler of the kings of the earth which harkens back again to Jesus' words to Pilate. Then after telling us that he has removed our iniquity we are told Jesus has made us 'a line of kings, priests to serve his God and Father.' We share not only in Christ's priesthood but also his kingly glory. This is the Jesus who will come on the clouds of heaven and will be seen by all. He is the cause of everything and the final purpose for which all creation exists, 'the Alpha and the Omega.'