

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER - C

The gospel reading for this Sunday gives us the appearances of Jesus to his disciples on the evening of Easter day then eight days later with Thomas present. The first reading continues with the Acts of the Apostles and we hear how the Church community grew marked by 'so many signs and wonders' and the healing work of Peter and the other apostles. The second reading gives us some of the opening verses of the book of the Apocalypse or Revelation where John is told to write down 'all that you see, and 'all that you see of present happenings and things still to come.'

The **First Reading** is from Acts of the Apostles. This New Testament book is part two of a history of the rise of Christianity, the first part being the gospel according to Luke. They became separated when, about 150 A.D., Christians wanted the four gospel accounts bound together in one volume. The author, Luke, is a Syrian from Antioch, a doctor of non-Jewish origin, who was a close friend of Paul accompanying him on his second and third missionary journeys. Luke collected a great deal of evidence from a variety of sources which he edited. The book deals with the primitive Jerusalem community under Peter's leadership, the spread of Christianity to Samaria, to the gentile peoples and the early days of Christianity in Antioch. From chapter 13 Luke deals with Paul's three missionary journeys and ends with Paul a prisoner in Rome.

The reading, 5.12-16, is another description of the growth of the young Church and how even in the Temple the early Christians, 'one in heart' gathered together. The apostles with Peter at their head worked 'many signs and wonders...among the people' which caused many from the neighbouring districts to bring the sick to be cured. A sign of Christ's redemptive power at work.'

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 117.2-4,22-27, was a processional hymn for the feast of Shelters (the grape harvest). The first verse is an invitation to give thanks to God followed by the hymn of thanksgiving. The two verses chosen for us are applicable to the saving work of Christ which we have just celebrated.

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; they 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, 1.9-13,17-19, contains a vision which John has. He is on the island of Patmos (off western Turkey) suffering along with his fellow Christians. Possessed by the Spirit a voice tells him to 'write down all you see' and John is to send what he has written to the seven churches of Asia (Turkey). He turns to see who is speaking and sees, 'a figure like the Son of man' (the Messiah as judge). The 'long robe' symbolises his priesthood and the 'golden girdle' his royalty. (There are other symbols not mentioned in our reading, his white hair symbolising his eternity; the burning eyes, to probe minds and hearts, his divine knowledge; the feet of bronze his permanence and 'his voice like the sound of an ocean' symbolises the fear inspired by his majesty.) John falls at his feet but is told not to be afraid, 'I am the Living One,' that is the risen Christ alive here and now, the one who has life in himself. 'I was dead and look---I am alive for ever and ever' with power over life and death. Again John is told 'write down all you see of these present happenings' that is the letters of chapters 2 and 3, 'and the things still to come' the revelations that come in chapters 4-22. It would be helpful to read v.4-20 of chapter one and just look over the letters and the prophetic visions that follow.