

## THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER - C

On this third Sunday of Easter we have almost the whole of the epilogue to John's gospel where Jesus appears for a third time to his disciples. We have John's account of the miraculous draft of fish and after Peter's triple denial of Jesus we have here a triple profession of love to which Jesus replies with a triple investiture. Jesus entrusts to Peter the care of ruling the flock in his name. In the first reading continuing with Acts we have the apostles led by Peter witnessing to Christ's resurrection. In the second reading from the book of Revelation we have a vision of Christ the Lamb being given all due praise and honour.

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.

Today's reading, 5.27-32,40-41, again speaks of the primitive Christian community. The reading leaves out the dramatic opening. The apostles had been arrested, locked in prison with warders guarding; during the night an angel of the Lord released them and told them to return to their preaching of the message of salvation. The full Senate met the next day and sent for the prisoners but they were not to be found in prison. They were told the prisoners were preaching in the Temple, even though the prison remained securely locked and the warders on duty. The apostles were re-arrested and brought before the high priest (which is where our reading begins) who demanded an explanation for their continued preaching after a formal warning. We should remember that the members of the early Church in Jerusalem were almost all Jews and continued with the practice of their Jewish faith consequently the Jewish authorities expected obedience from the apostles. The apostles though realised they had to obey a higher authority. Hence the opening words of Peter's reply to the high priest, 'Obedience to God comes before obedience to men.' Peter lays the blame for Jesus' death on leaders of Israel and goes on to say that God has now raised this Jesus from the dead and that they and the Holy Spirit are witnesses to this fact. The apostles were given another warning and released. From the very beginning proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ is met with opposition.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 29.2,4-6,11-13, is a psalm in thanksgiving after mortal danger and is a suitable reflection after the thoughts of Christ's death and resurrection in the first reading. The words are fairly easy to apply except perhaps the second two lines of the second verse. God's anger as it were due to our sins allowed Christ to suffer death but now he lives forever. Our tears are shed in the darkness for Christ in the tomb but then comes light with the resurrection, the dawn of a new age.

The **Book of the Apocalypse** (Greek) or **Revelation** (English) 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 prophet 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, 5.11-14, is part of a vision that John has. He sees the whole of creation giving praise in heaven to the Lamb that was sacrificed, the Lamb being Christ himself. Then praise is given, 'To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb.' The four animals are symbolic of four angels responsible for directing the physical world. In 4.6 these four living creatures are described 'all studded with eyes, in front and behind' which symbolise God's omniscience and providence. They give unceasing glory to God for his creation.