

## THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT - C

We begin our Lenten journey as every year with Christ in the wilderness. Having spent forty days there the devil approaches. It teaches us that Christ a true man was never immune from temptation throughout his earthly life and has endured what we have to endure in resisting temptation. In the first reading we have what might be called the creed of the Israelite nation setting out all God has done for them from the time of Abraham. The second reading is also in the words of Paul to the Romans a type of creed.

The **First Reading** is from the fifth book of the Law, the book of Deuteronomy. This book as the name suggests is a second law book and is distinct from the other four books of the Law in that, apart from chapters 31 and 34, it comes from a single written tradition: the Deuteronomic. This tradition has a distinctive style and its teaching constantly reaffirms that of all nations in the world, God has, out of pure love, chosen Israel to be his people, but this choice and the Covenant made with his people ratifying this choice are conditional on Israel giving allegiance exclusively to God, and to the prescribed worship to be offered to God in one single place of worship. The book is a code of civil and religious laws which are framed within a long discourse of Moses. The concluding chapters deal with the final days of Moses, the commissioning of Joshua to succeed Moses and Moses' death in sight of the Promised Land. The Deuteronomic code is a partial restatement of the laws promulgated in the desert and recalls the great events of Exodus, of Sinai and of the beginnings of the conquest of the Promised Land. Later the principles of Moses were re-thought by the prophets and adapted to the situation of the Israelites living in Palestine 600 years after Moses. After the fall of Samaria, 721, the book was stored away in the Temple in Jerusalem to be rediscovered in the reign of Josiah, 622. It was re-edited at the beginning of the Exile 587 and came to be regarded as a code of law laid down in his final years by Moses in Moab.

The reading, 26.4-10, comes towards the end of the discourse the Deuteronomic code. Moses is instructing the people on how to maintain their relationship with God once they have entered the Promised Land. When they harvest their first crops they are to 'set aside the first-fruits' of the soil, and they must put them in a basket and take them 'to the place where Yahweh your God chooses to give his name a home.' Our reading now begins with the priest taking the basket and presenting it to God and the person must then say the words of the creed which show his belief in God and express his gratitude for God's powerful deeds on behalf of the people bringing them to this land which they can now begin to own by conquest.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 90.1-2,10-15, gives the traditional teaching of God's protection for the upright person. The upright person being one who shows his belief in God and shows gratitude to God for his goodness. Such a person is seen in the first verse and the remainder of the psalm reveals God's goodness to that person.

The **Second Reading** is from Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome. Paul had not founded the Church in Rome but he intended to visit the Christians there on his way to Spain. The community in Rome was a mixture of Jewish and non-Jewish converts and there was a danger that they would look down on each other. Some of the converts from Judaism wanted pagan converts to be circumcised to ensure salvation. Paul maintained this made nonsense of Christ's redemptive work. The Law was good and holy but made those who kept the Law aware of their need of God's saving help. This help has now been given in Christ Jesus.

The reading, 10.8-13, comes from that section of the letter which deals with Israel's response to God's offer of salvation. Paul has taken the example of the man of faith Abraham, his faith in God justified him. In talking about the theme of salvation, a free gift of God through the Spirit, Paul has to consider the position of Israel, a people which has not responded with faith although it was given the promise of salvation. This he considers in chapters 9-11 of this letter. Just before our reading begins Paul has told his Jewish readers that Moses spoke of the saving justice that comes from the Law and how it will bring life to those who carry out the Law. But now, and our reading begins, "the word, that is the faith we proclaim is very near to you, it is on your lips and in your heart" and the reading goes on to give a mini profession of faith in Jesus Christ and that by believing they will be made righteous. The words of Paul, addressed to the Jewish converts in Rome, are equally applicable to each one of us today. They are applicable to all peoples because "all belong to the same Lord who is rich enough, however many ask his help, for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." This is a wonderful thought for us to carry in our minds as we meet many different people throughout our Lenten journey.