

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT - C

On this third Sunday we have an unfamiliar reading from Luke's gospel, this being Lent the reading presents us with a call to repentance but God is patient with us, he will give us time to change our ways. In the first reading we learn how Moses was called by God and sent to deliver his people from slavery in Egypt. The second reading like the gospel reading is in the form of a warning, we cannot presume anything but must be diligent in following Christ's teaching.

The **First Reading** is from the book of Exodus, the second book in the Bible and the second book of the Law. This book has two main themes: the deliverance from Egypt and the Covenant God made with the Israelites at Mt Sinai through Moses, the two are connected by the journey through the desert. Like the book of Genesis, Exodus is a compilation of three earlier documents and our reading today comes from two written traditions the Yahwistic, the burning bush scene, and the Elohist tradition, the revelation of the divine name. The Yahwistic tradition has a lively and vivid style and although God is described in human terms the author has a deep sense of the divine while the Elohist, from the use of Elohim to designate God, maintains the distance separating human beings from God.

The reading, 3.1-8,13-15, is clearly the preparatory part of the deliverance from Egypt. God calls Moses, the shepherd, tending sheep near the mountain of God, Mt Horeb. Moses is attracted to the burning bush and the voice reveals the presence of God, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, Moses is afraid to look at the sight, the holiness of God prevents him. We can pick out four verbs from the second paragraph which tell us about God: 'I have seen....I have heard....I am well aware....I mean to deliver.' Throughout their history the Israelites were aware or were reminded by the prophets of what God had done for them in Egypt and his faithful love endures. The final part of the reading gives the revelation of God's name one of the climatic moments in the OT but there are considerable difficulties in understanding the meaning of the words used. A possible interpretation is that God is the only truly existent being, he is transcendent and remains a mystery to man but acts in human history guiding the course of history to an end. For us the utter holiness of God and his enduring faithful love must be an inspiration.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 102. 1-4,6-8,11, develops God's attributes with an accent on tenderness and pity which are a reflection on what God has in mind for his suffering people in Egypt: 'The Lord does deeds of justice, gives judgement for all who are oppressed.'

The **Second Reading** is from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Paul evangelised the church at Corinth between A.D. 50 and 52. His policy was to establish the Christian faith in a centre of population, and here he chose the great and populous port of Corinth, so that the faith could spread to the whole of the province of Achaia. The Christian community grew strong composed mainly of poor people, but Corinth was a centre of Greek life, philosophy and religions. It was also a notorious centre of immorality which was to cause problems for the newly converted. In 1Corinthians Paul addresses urgent problems that faced the church there and the decisions that had to be made to address these problems such as moral conduct, of marriage and virginity, of liturgical and Eucharistic meetings, of charisms, of matters concerning the Church and the world, appeals to civil courts, eating foods sacrificed to idols. Paul's religious genius enabled him to use all these problems as a vehicle to expound the profound doctrines of Christian liberty, the sanctification of the body, the supremacy of love, union with Christ. Paul teaches the Corinthians that there is only one master, Christ, and only one message, the cross and there is one true wisdom, the Spirit.

The reading, 10.1-6,10-12, is a commentary on what Paul has said in the previous verse. There he tells the Corinthians that 'I punish my body and bring it under control to avoid any risk that, having acted as a herald for others, I myself may be disqualified.' Paul had no illusions even though he had been called personally by Christ he could still lose his soul. So he warns the Corinthians with an example from the Exodus. Those Israelites may have passed through the Red Sea and may have been baptised into Moses and they may have eaten the same spiritual food and drink from the rock, a type of the Eucharist, but God was not pleased with them and their corpses littered the desert. Our salvation is not to be seen as automatic because we have received the sacraments of initiation. Paul says: 'Be warned!' The lesson is clear for us today, it is all too easy to lapse into habits of sin which are as displeasing to God as the behavior of some of Israelites in the desert all those years ago. To use Paul's example, just as athletes deprive themselves of everything to win the prize, we must accept privation in order to receive a heavenly reward, a lesson for Lent.