

THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - B

The gospel reading gives us Mark's account of Jesus' visit to his home town, Nazareth. Jesus' wisdom and knowledge and the 'miracles that are worked through him' are too much for the local people 'and they would not accept him.' Their lack of faith amazes Jesus. The first reading from Ezekiel parallels to some extent the mission of the prophet and Jesus' visit to Nazareth, the obstinate Israelites will have to learn that God has sent a prophet among them to whom they must listen. The second reading continues with the second letter to the Corinthians. Paul, a teacher sent by Christ, is prepared for all the hardships that come his way in trying to preach the Gospel.

The **First Reading** is from the prophet Ezekiel, one of the major prophets of Israel. Ezekiel's whole ministry, it is thought, was among the exiles in Babylon. The Exile lasted from 587 to 538 B.C. Called by God to maintain the faith of the Israelites during this traumatic period of their history, Ezekiel's entire teaching centres on inner conversion: we must achieve a new heart and a new spirit, see Ezk.36.26. The Temple was his ruling interest and he holds the Law in veneration. Ezekiel is primarily a visionary, his four formal visions occupy a substantial part of the book. The Messiah is not to be a king but a shepherd who will look for individual rather than collective reparation. The book is divided into four parts: 1. Threats and reproaches addressed to the Israelites. 2. Proclamations against the nations. 3. Comfort during and after the siege of Jerusalem. 4. Provisions for a new political and religious constitution after the Exile.

Today's reading, 2.2-5, is from the introduction. It is from one of Ezekiel's visions, the vision of the scroll, in which Ezekiel receives his prophetic call. The spirit tells him to eat the scroll containing God's words and then Ezekiel must tell the words to the House of Israel. The spirit came into Ezekiel and spoke sending the prophet to the rebel Israelites. They are stubborn and obstinate but 'whether they listen or not (they) will know there is a prophet among them.' The similarity between these Israelites of Ezekiel's day and those who turned away from Jesus in Nazareth is clear. The prophet Ezekiel would bring comfort and a promise of return to their homeland as Jesus, the prophet, would bring comfort and a promise of return to our true homeland in heaven.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 122, was one of the psalms probably sung by pilgrims on their way up to Jerusalem, a psalm of ascent. It is a prayer in time of distress, the distress being the contempt the restored community received from the surrounding Gentiles on their return from exile. For us today the psalm can remind us of the exiled Israelite peoples. They feel like slaves and slave-girls in Babylon, so they lift up their eyes to God to take pity on them, they have had their full share of scornful jeers.

The **Second Reading** is from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. Paul evangelized the Church at Corinth between 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 2 Corinthians Paul is able to say that the abuses dealt with in his earlier letter had been corrected. In the first, main part of the letter he writes magnificently about the dignity of the apostle's mission. Chapters 8-9 deal with collecting money which he illuminates with the ideal of union between the churches. The final section is in the form of an apologia when he is accused of weakness and ambition.

Today's reading, 12.7-10, is from the last part of the letter, his apologia. We need to read from the beginning of chapter 10 to understand the whole of Paul's argument. Paul argues that he is not lacking in courage to speak as boldly when he is with the Corinthians as he does in his letters; he is not boastful of his achievements among them, but measures these achievements by the standard that God has laid down; Paul admits his jealousy, which is God's jealousy, because they have forsaken the true apostles for the teaching of 'super-apostles' or counterfeit apostles, 'dishonest workers disguising themselves as apostles of Christ'. Paul lists all the sufferings he has undergone as a true servant of Christ, unlike these 'super-apostles.' Next, he mentions the personal revelation he received when he 'was caught up into Paradise' which has inspired Paul, but cannot be revealed to any other person. And then our reading, Paul tells the Corinthians that he was 'given a thorn in the flesh' to prevent him from becoming too proud, so that in his weakness he could come to rely on 'the power of Christ' present in him. So Paul is glad for all his sufferings, 'for it is when I am weak that I am strong.' We can learn much from the apostle Paul.