

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME - A

With this Sunday we return to the yearly Sunday cycle. Jesus is presented to us in the gospel as someone who is gentle and humble in heart, a man of compassion to those who find life a burden. The first reading encourages us to rejoice because our King comes to us not as an overbearing Lord, but with humility proclaiming peace for the nation. In the second reading Paul encourages us to live lives in the Spirit, the Spirit who gave Jesus himself new life.

The **First Reading** is from the prophet Zechariah. Zechariah was one of the twelve minor prophets whose writings are found towards the end of the Old Testament in the Bible. The book is divided into two parts ch.1-8; 9-14. The introduction is dated 520 BC just after the return from Exile in Babylon 587-538 BC. Zechariah was a contemporary of the prophet Haggai and in the first part he deals with the restoration of the Temple but laid more stress on national restoration and the irreproachable moral conduct that this demands. In eight visions he shows how constantly God has proved his readiness to save. His expectation of the end of time is urgent. His teachings also revive royal messianism of earlier times. Part two of the book is quite different and, not connected with the first part and written in the late 300's after Alexander's conquest of the Middle East, is really in two distinct sections. The second section is of particular interest for its messianic teaching and it is from this section that our reading comes, the expectation of a humble and pacific messianic King.

The reading, 9:9-10, tells of the royal saviour. The opening verses of the chapter speak of a conquering advance, interpreted as an act of the Lord heralding the messianic age, and then our reading speaks of the royal saviour. People of Zion (Jerusalem) should rejoice because their King is approaching, vindicated by God's saving justice. This messianic King is to be humble as are to be the future people of God. He will renounce all the usual panoply of historic kings, the messianic King will ride the traditional mount of kings, a donkey. He will bring true peace banishing all warfare and his justice and peace will stretch 'to the limits of the earth.' This prophecy is seen to be fulfilled in Jesus who in today's gospel reading shows himself to be such a King.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 144.1-2,8-11,13-14, is an alphabetical psalm, following the Hebrew alphabet, in praise of God the King. The psalm recalls God's tenderness, pity, faithful love and generosity and that he is 'slow to anger abounding in love.' So we should thank and praise our God. His reign is everlasting so he is everlastingly trustworthy and supports all who are bowed down. A beautiful psalm echoing the first reading and giving us a mirror image of Jesus in the gospel reading.

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 help. This help has now been given in Christ Jesus which is explained in some detail.

In the reading, 8.9,11-13, Paul is teaching about the Christian's spiritual life, or our life in the Spirit. In chapter 7 Paul has been telling the converts from Judaism that they are freed from slavishly following the old Law and goes on to speak in the person of humanity of the inward struggle we have to face under the empire of sin and not yet justified. Whereas in chapter 8 he speaks in the name of the justified Christian with the gift of the Spirit. The law of the Spirit gives life in Christ Jesus and sets one free. Those who live by their natural inclinations have their minds set on human desires, but those who live by the Spirit have their minds set on spiritual things. Our reading now comes in with Paul telling them not live by their natural inclinations but by the Spirit because the Spirit has made a home in them. It is this Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead and because he now lives in them the Spirit will give life to their mortal bodies. So they must not be ruled by their bodily desires because if they do they will die; if they live by the Spirit they will have life. There is a message for us to control our earthly desires and listen to the Spirit.