

THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME - A

The readings for this Sunday give us a foretaste of the Eucharist. In the gospel reading Jesus will not let the disciples send the people away hungry, he will feed them himself and in doing so gives us an image of his bounteous love. The first reading from the mouth of Isaiah foretells of this rich food we are to enjoy. The second reading concludes Paul's teaching on the Christian's spiritual life.

The **First Reading** comes from the prophet Isaiah. He was one of the major prophets in Israel but the book which bears his name is not all his work. The reading today comes from the second part of the book, Second Isaiah, chs.40-55, written by an anonymous upholder of the Isaian tradition, which deal with a period of Jewish history 200 years after Isaiah's day, when Jerusalem has fallen and the nation is in exile in Babylon 587-583. Cyrus, the instrument of God, is about to come and overpower the Babylonian Empire and be the means by which the Israelites are able to return, a new Exodus. This part of the book, in contrast with the first part which is for the most part threatening, is far more consoling as the opening words announce, "Console my people." The judgement of God has been fulfilled with the punishment of exile and restoration is at hand.

The reading, 55.1-3, comes from the end of this part of Isaiah. It is the final invitation to the people still suffering in exile to participate in the benefits of the new covenant and be converted while there is still time. The prophet is pleading with the exiles, come and buy food without money, good things to eat and rich food to enjoy. They must listen carefully and pay attention for this is what God promises and 'buy' into the new covenant and God will feed them rich food. Similarly in the gospel reading, the crowds who 'followed' Jesus are fed free of charge and when Jesus finally gives himself as the food of life, it comes free. All we have to do is to believe to receive the full benefits of this food.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 144.8-9,15-18, is one of the alphabetical psalms, each verse beginning with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It is a psalm of praise to God the King, speaking of his compassionate love to all his creatures. The second stanza links in with the theme of the first and gospel readings "you give them their food in due time." We should have supreme confidence this God who is just and loving to all who from their hearts call on him.

The **Second Reading** is from Paul's letter to the Romans. 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.

The reading, 8.37-39, completes Paul's teaching on the Christian's spiritual life. He has spoken of our life in the Spirit and how we should live spiritual lives. The Spirit who lives in us enables us to call God our Father, and although we may have to suffer, we must not lose hope in the glory that awaits us because the Spirit helps us to pray in accordance with the mind of God. God works with those who love him. The glory, lost by sin, which Christ possesses is to be progressively communicated to all Christ has called to be children of God. So Paul concludes full of hope in today's reading. With the help of God's power we can come through all our trials and tribulations, mentioned in the previous verses, for Paul is certain that nothing, and here he gives a whole list of possibilities, can come between us and the love of God, known to us in Christ Jesus our Lord. Read the whole of ch.8 if you have time.