

## THE TWENTIETH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - A

On this Sunday we listen to the wonderful story of the Canaanite woman from the district of Tyre and Sidon. She asks Jesus to have pity and heal her tormented daughter. Although initially rebuffed Jesus knows and rewards her faith and her daughter is healed. In the first reading we hear how 'foreigners who have attached themselves to the Lord...I will bring to my holy mountain.' The second reading continues with Paul telling the Romans that he preaches to the pagans and brings them into the fold to make his own people envious and hopefully bring them back to the love of God who 'never takes back his gifts or revokes his choice.'

The **First Reading** comes from the third part of Isaiah. The work, Isaiah 56-66, is a composite collection, its various parts dating from before the end of the Exile, 538 B.C. to the rebuilding of the Temple in 520 B.C. Taken as a whole this last part of the book of Isaiah seems to be the work of Second Isaiah's disciples composed sometime after the return from exile. It can be considered the final product of the Isaian tradition, active from the days of the great eighth century prophet himself.

The reading, 56.1,6-7, begins with a statement from the Lord God and we learn that the salvation which is to come is available to all. God will accept the prayer and sacrifices of proselytes and bring them to his holy mountain if they 'cling to my covenant.' This reading shows a development in the thinking of Israel, God's word revealed through Moses and the prophets is not for the Israelites exclusively but for everyone and God's house is to be 'called a house of prayer for all peoples.'

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 66.2-3,5-6,8 is possibly a song sung at harvest time or harvest festival. The refrain and the first two lines of verse three are in the spirit of the second part of Isaiah. The example of the Chosen People and the lessons of its history teach the pagan nations that they too are summoned to serve the one true God. With these thoughts in mind the lines of the Psalm have meaning. This is a good reflection on the first reading and prepare us for 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. This huge letter, with much detailed teaching, written in the winter of 57/58, is difficult to summarise. 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 their 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.

The reading, 11.13-15,29-32. Paul is still dealing with Israel's part in the development of salvation history, chapters 9-11. In our reading Paul is speaking to the converts from paganism saying that while he is the apostle of the gentiles he is still working for the salvation of his own people by making 'my own people envious of you (the converts from paganism), and in this way save some of them.' He tells the Jewish converts that for those Jews who have not followed Christ, God will not take back his gifts or choice of them, they are disobedient now but this will only show God's mercy to all mankind.