

THE TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - B

On this Sunday we have the last reading from chapter six of John's gospel on the Bread of Life. Jesus has finished his teaching and we hear how those in the synagogue at Capernaum receive the teaching. Many don't like what Jesus has taught and 'many of his disciples left him.' Jesus wants to know if the Twelve will walk away and Peter answers saying: 'we believe; we know you are the Holy One of God.'

The **First Reading** is from the book of Joshua, the book which follows the five books of the Pentateuch, the books of the Law and is followed by the book of Judges. The book of Joshua is in three parts: 1. The conquest of the Promised Land, ch.1-12. 2. The partition of the land between the twelve tribes, ch.13-21. 3. The last days of Joshua, his last discourse and the assembly at Shechem, ch.22-24. Various sources have been used in compiling the book and Jewish tradition does not attribute the book to Joshua. The events recorded in the first part of the book aim to provide, by looking at the past, explanation for facts and situations still observable to the author. The second part of the book in the main gives the geographical location of each tribe's territory with the cities of Judah being listed. The third part brings the book to a conclusion with Joshua's last discourse and the Shechem assembly where the people, now in the Promised Land, renew the Covenant with Yahweh and swear allegiance to the one true God. The book gives the impression that the Promised Land was conquered as a collective tribal effort under Joshua's leadership but the book of Judges gives a different story of individual tribes struggling to survive which is closer to the truth. The Northern tribes settled their territories at some remote time and never went to Egypt but joined the Shechem Assembly and renewed their faith in Yahweh. Throughout the book, idealised and simplified, Joshua remains the heroic figure who leads his people after Moses.

Today's reading, 24.1-2,15-18, is from the Great Assembly at Shechem. Joshua gathers all the tribes and the elders of the people and they present themselves to God now that they are settled in the Promised Land and Joshua challenges them, will they serve the Lord or follow alien gods? The people protest their intention of serving only 'the Lord' who brought them out of the house of slavery and worked such wonders as they journeyed through the desert. We can see a parallel between what Joshua asks the tribes and what Jesus, the new Joshua, asks the Twelve.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 33.2-3,16-23, is the same psalm as last Sunday with a similar response, a psalm in praise of God's justice. The opening is in praise of God and this long psalm continues showing how God attends the upright, the broken-hearted, those who serve God while those who do evil, the wicked who hate the upright will suffer God's punishment. This, in response to the first reading, is the path the Israelites must follow in their new homeland.

The **Second Reading** is from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. If you have time read the whole of this wonderful letter, it's only six chapters long. The letter was written while Paul was imprisoned in Rome (61-63 A.D.) and he follows what he taught in Colossians about the subordinate place of the powers of the universe by teaching that God 'has put all things under his (Christ's) feet and made him the head of the Church which is his Body, the fullness of him who is filled, all in all.' He then deals with the continuous problem of Jew and gentile. Salvation is a gift given by God through Christ and this salvation is available equally to Jew and gentile, this shows something of the infinite wisdom of the mystery of God's inexhaustible love. In the last analysis God's plans are seen to be fulfilled in Christ, and in the Church the extension of Christ through history. This unity in Christ is incompatible with any lack of charity for their attitude to each other is the measure of their attitude to Christ in whom all are one.

The reading, 5.21-32, shows how God's plans are seen to be fulfilled in Christ and it is often chosen as a reading at wedding ceremonies. Paul makes a comparison between Christ and his bride the Church and a couple living their married lives. Paul is not advocating a patriarchal society it was a fact of life in his day, but trying to show that the love between Christ and his Church should be mirrored in the love of man and wife. Christ gave himself for his bride the Church showing her such great love similarly a husband must show great love for his wife and continually earn her love and respect as head of the family. Further through our reception of Holy Communion we, the Church, become one with Christ indeed we become Christ; so a man and woman become one through their marital bond. Paul says this mystery of love has many implications, here he is thinking primarily of Christ and his Church.