

## THE TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – B

Last week following Peter's profession of faith in Jesus' identity we listened to the first prophecy of the passion, today with Jesus passing through Galilee we hear the second prophecy and the teaching that accompanies it about discipleship. In the first reading we hear how a virtuous man is condemned to death to see if God will take his part. In the second reading James speaks of the wisdom that comes from God for it brings peace.

The **First Reading** is from the book of Wisdom. The wisdom literature in the Bible comes after the historical books and comprises the books of Job, the Psalms, the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, the Book of Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus. Wisdom literature flourished throughout the ancient East, it treats of the meaning of life and offers a recipe for successful living. Wisdom literature in Israel came from the same soil and was absorbed in the individual and his destiny but was viewed in the clearer light of the religion of Yahweh. Real wisdom is found in the fear of God since God alone is wise. Wisdom is an outpouring of the glory of the Almighty, an image of his perfection. Wisdom is sure to bring happiness and folly, ruin. This is the doctrine on which the teaching of Wisdom is based. All this teaching was preparing for the revelation of Wisdom incarnate as Matthew says: "here is someone greater than Solomon."

The book of Wisdom itself may be divided as follows, the first section, ch.1-5, defines the function of Wisdom in man's destiny; the second section, ch.6-9, treats of the origin and nature of Wisdom; the last section, ch.10-19, celebrates the part played by Wisdom and by God in the history of the chosen people. The authorship of the book is attributed to Solomon, the wisest king in Israel. The author was an Alexandrian Jew who wrote towards the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C., he commends Wisdom, born of God, obtained by prayer, the mainspring of all the virtues. This life is seen as a preparation for another in which the virtuous live with God and the wicked are punished. He sees Wisdom as an attribute of God.

The reading, 2.12,17-20, comes from the first part of the book and in the second chapter speaks of life as the godless see it, as the opening line makes clear. The sinless seek out the virtuous man, test him with cruelty and finally death. The early Christians saw the resemblance between this passage and Christ's sufferings. The author has the faithful Jews of Alexandria in mind who were mocked and persecuted for their faith. The text can be applied to the Upright Man of any generation.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 53.3-6, appeals to God, the just judge. The psalmist seeks God's help in time of trouble similar to the reading. He is confident that God will come to his aid. A reflection on the first reading.

The **Second Reading** is from the letter of St. James. This is one of the so called universal letters – that is addressed to all Christians not, as in the Pauline letters, addressed to a particular community. This letter was not widely known at first and only came to be accepted into the canon of New Testament scripture near the end of the fourth century. Who exactly James was, is still uncertain, he is not thought to be either of the two James in the apostolic college. The letter is thought to have been written at the end of the first or the beginning of the second century. The letter is addressed to the 'twelve tribes of the Dispersion' i.e. to Jewish Christians scattered over the Graeco-Roman world. It presumes the readers are familiar with the Old Testament which is not quoted precisely but alluded to in an imprecise fashion. This James is a Judaeo-Christian sage who has rethought the maxims of Jewish Wisdom in the light of Jesus' teachings. The letter is like a sermon advising, on how to behave in time of trial, on the origin of temptation, on how to control the tongue, on good relations and sympathy with one's neighbour, and on the power of prayer. There are two main themes in the book, the first praises the poor and threatens the favoured ones; the second insists that Christians must do good works and not be content with a faith that produces nothing. Faith must be related to good works.

The reading, 3.16-4.3, contrasts those who are jealous and ambitious with those who seek wisdom which 'comes down from above and is essentially something pure.' Peacemakers working for peace bear fruit in holiness. James continues saying it is our own uncontrolled desires which cause unhappiness. We should pray for what we desire and if our prayer isn't answered James tells gives us the reason.