

## THE TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - C

On this Sunday we have another of Jesus' parables as he makes his way to Jerusalem. Jesus is in effect saying that his followers must be as astute as the dishonest steward in their dealings with evil. In this world we have to make a choice between love of God and love of money. In the first reading Amos exposes the treachery of dishonest traders and reminds them of God's anger. In the second reading we continue listening to Paul's advice to his disciple Timothy.

The **First Reading** is from the prophet Amos, one of the twelve minor prophets whose words are recorded in the Bible. A sheep farmer in the Judean desert, he was called by God to prophesy in Israel. He preached during the reign of Jeroboam II, 783-743, during which the Northern Kingdom grew wealthy, the poor were exploited, and the spectacular liturgy at the Bethel shrine lacked true worship of God. Amos preached at this schismatic shrine and also in Samaria. He was very direct in his approach and in the name of God he condemned corrupt city life, social injustice and deceitful liturgies. For Amos Yahweh, God of Israel, was sovereign Lord of all the world, and Yahweh's Day would come when Israel would suffer God's vengeance at the hands of the Assyrians. Yet all is not lost, Amos looks forward to the salvation of the House of Joseph. His profound belief in an all-powerful and universal Lord he teaches without any hesitation. He looks for an Israel whose belief and worship of God are what was promised to God in the beginning, pure Yahwism. Like all the prophets his teaching was rejected, he was expelled and he returned to his sheep. This reading, 8.4-7, comes after the fourth vision of a basket of ripe fruit. God says to Amos 'the time is ripe (i.e. the end has come) for my people Israel' and God goes on to say how he will punish them 'the corpses will be many that are thrown down everywhere.' The reading which follows this vision explains, justifies and elaborates the prophecy of the end contained in the fourth vision so it would be helpful to read the first three verses of this chapter. The 'New Moon' mentioned in the third line, like the Sabbath, halted business hence the deceitful traders can't wait for it to be over. 'The pride of Jacob' in the penultimate line of the reading has several possible meanings: it could be a divine title that Yahweh swears by, or Israel's arrogant pride or again the land of Palestine.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 112.1-2,4-8, is a hymn of praise to the God of glory and mercy and with its references to the poor is a good reflection on the first reading. First God is praised 'from the rising of the sun to its setting.' Then God's position *vis a vis* mankind is duly acknowledged and in the last verse God's treatment of the poor so different from Amos' experiences in Israel. The poor are given a princely throne and the barren woman, such a disgrace in Israel becomes 'the happy mother of sons.'

The **Second Reading** comes from Paul's first letter to Timothy. The letters 1 Timothy, Titus, 2 Timothy are known as the Pastoral Epistles, letters from Paul to his most loyal disciples giving them instruction and advice about the organisation and governing of the communities which he had entrusted to their care. Both 1Tim and Tt seem to have been written from Ephesus c.65 AD and 2 Tim before Paul's death in 67AD. There is much uncertainty about the authorship and dating of the letters and some hold the letters were written by a follower of Paul who after Paul's death attributed the letters to his hand a literary convention of the time. They must have been written if this is the case soon after Paul's death because the ecclesiastical hierarchy which developed after the death of the apostles is in a stage of evolution in these letters. In this reading, 2.1-8, Paul is giving advice on liturgical prayer. Prayer should be offered 'for kings and others in authority' that the Church community may live 'peaceful and quiet lives.' Perhaps Paul fears for the future, will they be allowed to live peaceful and quiet lives? The next two sentences bring out the divine purpose in the Incarnation, Christ 'wants everyone to be saved' and this can only be achieved by receiving 'a full knowledge of the truth.' This truth can only be found in Christ Jesus 'the one mediator between God and humanity.' Jesus is mediator precisely as a human being and it is this which enables him to be Saviour of all by his death to ransom all mankind. 'He is the evidence of this' i.e. by dying on the Cross Jesus made clear to the world God's plan to save all humanity and 'sent at the appointed time' i.e. the time appointed by the Father. Paul claims to be a truthful witness to this teaching for all peoples. He concludes by asking for peace and harmony accompanying their reverent prayer.