

THE TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - B

In this Sunday's gospel reading we have one of the few teaching sections in Mark's gospel where we are taught that it is not only those whose are members of the Church who can work for the coming of God's kingdom. In the second part of the reading Jesus uses hyperbole to emphasise the seriousness of scandal or being an obstacle to the development of someone's faith and to point out the seriousness of sin. The first reading from the book of Numbers reflects the teaching in Mark. Two Israelite elders were prophesying in an unauthorised way and Joshua wants them stopped. The second reading is the final one from St James in which riches and dishonesty are shown to be worthless.

The **First Reading** is from the book of Numbers. In the book of Exodus we left the Israelites at Mt Sinai. The following book, Leviticus, is taken up with legislation, and Numbers resumes the account of the desert journey. Before they depart Sinai there is a census of the people taken (ch.1-4) and sacrifice of dedication is offered (ch.7). The Passover is celebrated (ch.9), then the Israelites leave Sinai and, after various halts reach Kadesh from where several unsuccessful attempts are made to enter Canaan from the south (ch.9-14). After a period in Kadesh they move on to the Plains of Moab opposite Jericho (ch.20-25). Here the Midianites are defeated and the tribes of Gad and Reuben settle in Transjordan. Interspersed between these narratives are groups of Laws which either supplement the Sinai code or prepare for life in Canaan. The book was written much later than the events described so cannot be considered historical but some of the book's content is very ancient and preserves early traditions about the wilderness period.

Today's reading, 11.25-29, is from one of the halts in the desert on the way to Kadesh. At this place the Israelites again complain against Yahweh, they are punished and they appeal to Moses. Crying in their hunger and wishing they were back in Egypt, Moses himself appeals to Yahweh saying the responsibility for all these people is too much for him. God tells Moses to select seventy elders who are to assist him in his duty and Yahweh says he will provide meat for all the people for a month which Moses doubts. Moses tells the people God's words and collects the seventy and here our reading begins. God's spirit descends on Moses and the seventy elders and the seventy prophesy. Now we have the story of the two elders, Eldad and Medad, who had stayed back in the camp. They had received the spirit and began to prophesy. Joshua wants Moses to stop them and Moses asks if Joshua is jealous of them. Would that all God's people had received the spirit and were prophets says Moses. They are doing God's work, why stop them is Moses' thought, like Jesus in the gospel reading.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 18.8,10,12-14, is a hymn which celebrated God as Creator of the heavens, and particularly of the sun and the author of the Law. Nature and Law manifest God's perfection. The first two verses praise God's Law for it is perfect, it is to be trusted, it gives wisdom, is holy and is truthful. And the hymn continues saying God's law is instructive leading one in a blameless life.

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.

Today's reading, 5.1-5, comes from the conclusion of the letter giving a warning to those who are rich and self-confident. Riches will go the way of all things, the moth and rust will have their way, even our bodies will suffer corruption. It is then that those who have been cheated and oppressed will cry to the Lord Sabaoth, and the reading concludes pointing out the evil ways of the rich. The thought of James is brought to a conclusion, in the verses following our reading, on the day of Judgement for 'the Judge is already to be seen waiting at the gates.'