

THE THIRTIETH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - B

Today's gospel reading is the last before Jesus, according to Mark, completes his journey to Jerusalem and begins his short ministry in that city. It is the story of the blind beggar who will not be silenced such is his faith in Jesus. He is cured of his blindness and follows Jesus along the road to Jerusalem where Jesus is of course to suffer and to die. In the first reading from Jeremiah the prophet is telling the inhabitants of Jerusalem that although they will suffer defeat at the hands of their enemies yet God will save 'the remnant of Israel.' In the second reading from Hebrews the writer is comparing the priests of the old Law with Jesus, made high priest by the Father.

The **First Reading** is from the prophet Jeremiah one of the major prophets in Israel. He was called by God as a young man in the reign of Josiah, a good king of Judah when there were hopes for reform and a return to Godly ways. Josiah was killed in battle in 609 and with the rise of the Chaldean empire, king Nebuchadnezzar imposed his rule on Judah who sought support from Egypt. They revolted twice, in 597 and 587, which resulted in the capture and destruction of the Temple and the city, many of its inhabitants being carried off into slavery to Babylon. Jeremiah lived and worked in these final traumatic days, preaching, issuing threats of God's anger and foretelling the final disaster. He suffered greatly not only from those who considered him a defeatist because he was opposed to war as a solution to Judah's problems but also from his own inner conflicts. A man of peace he had to fight against the whole population from kings and priests to false prophets and the whole nation. He was a Job-like figure inwardly tortured by the work God had given him to do, but all this helped to purify his soul and he saw Israel's relationship with God in a new light. God looks at the heart and rewards each according to their works. So the new covenant (31.31.) expresses a new start, a new relationship with God, the Law will no longer be written on tablets of stone but within the hearts of the people of Israel. Jeremiah died a failure, a fugitive in Egypt, but his teachings grew in importance in helping to shape the future of Israel.

The reading, 31.7-9, is from the third part of the book, the Book of Consolation, which is part of the larger section the Prophecies of Happiness. The first part of the reading refers to the northern kingdom, Israel, and the hope of return for the exiles of 721, the fall of Samaria, but then the reading speaks of bringing 'them back from the land of the north' which probably refers to the people of Judah returning from their exile in Babylon. Our attention is drawn to those returning, 'the blind and the lame, women with child, women in labour...a mighty throng will return here.' returning with tears of repentance. We can liken them to the blind man in the gospel reading pleading for Jesus' mercy. God is our Father who will guide us along the paths of salvation.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 125, is the song of returning exiles. They feel as though their return is a dream, they cannot believe what great deeds God had done for them bringing them back to their homeland. The reference is made to the Negeb, which, nearly always dry, is abundantly watered in winter making the soil fruitful. So the psalm concludes with thoughts of sowing their own harvest again and reaping a harvest, God sowed them in exile in tears but now they return full of joy.

The **Second Reading** is from the letter to the Hebrews. This wonderful letter to the Jewish Christians was for a time attributed to Paul's pen but now this is considered not to be the case although he is considered to have had some indirect influence on the letter's contents. It would seem from internal evidence that the letter was written about 67AD. The letter is addressed to Jewish people who have a good knowledge of the covenant God made with their people, and who became Christians. They left Jerusalem and with an uncertain faith, they yearn for the splendour of the ceremonies carried out in the Temple. They are tempted to revert to Judaism, but the writer is intent on preventing this by helping them to see their new life in Christ. They are on a new exodus to the Promised Land (heaven), with Christ, not Moses, as their leader whose one sacrifice on the Cross replaces the many sacrifices of the old priesthood. The letter is a good teaching letter for us showing the harmony between the Old and New Testaments.

The reading, 5.1-6, comes from the second section of the letter which deals with 'Jesus the Faithful and Merciful High Priest.' Our reading compares the high priests of the old Law who can sympathise with those 'who have gone astray' because they were like all mankind subject to human weakness and they cannot presume to take the honour of the priesthood for themselves, they have to be called by God. Similarly Jesus did not give 'himself the glory of becoming a high priest', it came from God when he said: 'You are a priest forever, of the order of Melchizedek.' The reading goes on to tell of life of his prayer and entreaty and how through the suffering he undertook Jesus learnt obedience and became the source of salvation for all who in their turn obey him. We learn that suffering which we try to avoid is part of the Christian vocation.