

## THE THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – B

As we draw near to the end of the Church's liturgical year the reading from Mark's gospel leads us to think about the end of time when the Son of Man will come on the clouds of heaven. We don't know when that day will be but those who are ready, 'his chosen' will be gathered into Christ as described in a vision of the prophet Daniel (7.13-14). The first reading from the prophet Daniel is one of the key texts in the OT on the resurrection of the body. The second reading continues with the letter to the Hebrews repeating again the teaching that by Christ's one single sacrifice all sins have been forgiven.

The **First Reading** is from the prophet Daniel. This is one of the prophetic books in the Bible coming after Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel and before the twelve minor prophets. The book falls into two main parts, the first, chapters 1-6, contains the narratives of Daniel and his companions' trials in which their reputation and even their lives are at stake. Daniel and his companions emerge victorious and their persecutors glorify God for having saved them. The action takes place apparently in Babylon in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, his son and his son's successor. The second half of the book relates to visions granted to Daniel. The author is writing (167-164 BC) a long time after the events recorded and has made use of oral and written traditions still current in his own time and he has made the hero of these pious tales a certain Daniel. The aim of the book is to sustain the faith and hope among the Jews during persecution in the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes (175-163 BC). Daniel and his companions had suffered similarly although this present persecutor is painted in very dark colours, but he will be destroyed and the kingdom of the Saints, ruled over by the Son of Man, will be realised (ch.7). The revelation in the book concerns the hidden plan of God, who controls times and seasons, for his people and the nations. The book is not truly part of the prophetic tradition, it has affinities with wisdom literature in the first part and apocalyptic literature in the second part, the book of the Apocalypse is its NT counterpart.

The reading, 12.1-3, follows the overthrow of the persecutor, Antiochus Epiphanes and our reading starts, 'At that time Michael will arise---the great Prince, defender of your people.' The reading says there is going to be a time of great distress, those spared will be those whose names appear in the Book, the book recording human deeds and describing human fate. Then comes a clear description of the resurrection of the dead, either to everlasting life or to everlasting disgrace. Those who are to be rewarded for their learning and teaching will shine 'bright as stars for all eternity.'

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 15.5,8-11, speaks of the Lord as 'my portion and my cup,' but other translations translate the first line, 'My birthright, my cup is Yahweh.' 'Birthright' that is something which belongs to me as a human being and 'cup' in the sense of what is of importance to me. The rest of the psalm falls into place following this first line, I will keep the Lord ever before my eyes, you will not abandon me but show me the path of life.

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, 10.11-14,18, is part of the summary of teaching towards the end of the letter in the section which speaks of the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice. The reading again emphasizes the uniqueness of Christ's sacrifice. It repeats what has already been said about the priests of the old law having to offer sacrifices for sin over and over again whereas Christ offers one single sacrifice for sin and now sits at the right hand of God. This one single sacrifice 'has achieved eternal perfection for all.' Early Christian liturgy, the Eucharist, was not held in some magnificent building like the Temple in Jerusalem with its solemn liturgy. For the early Christians the building was not important, as Paul told his converts, you are the living temple of God and they gathered for the celebration of the Eucharist in a simple house. It was the grandeur of the Temple that the Jewish converts missed and the author is trying to help them understand. In a different way we too need greater understanding.