

## THE THIRD SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - A

The gospel reading for this Sunday has Jesus returning out of harm's way to Galilee which again for Matthew's Jewish readers can be seen as a fulfilment of prophecy. Matthew then records the call of the first four disciples and the beginning of Jesus' preaching and healing mission in the region of Galilee. The first reading from Isaiah prepares us for Matthew teaching that Jesus is fulfilling the prophet's words. We continue with Paul's words to the Corinthians in the second reading where Paul teaches quite clearly against factions in the Corinthian community.

The **First Reading** comes from the prophet Isaiah, the first part of the book, chs.1-39. Isaiah was born about 765 BC and received his prophetic vocation while in the Temple in Jerusalem. His mission was to proclaim the fall of Israel and Judah as punishment for the nation's infidelity. He exercised his ministry for forty years and proclaimed his teaching in four distinct periods. It seems Isaiah finished his teaching by 700, after which date we know nothing of the prophet. There is a tradition that his life ended in martyrdom. His writings show Isaiah to be a poet of genius. The revelation of the transcendence of God and of human unworthiness he received in the Temple at the time of his call left a lasting mark on the prophet. For Isaiah, as a result of this revelation, God is awesome, a God who is Holy, Strong, the Mighty One, the King. We are his creatures defiled by sin for which God demands reparation insisting on just living among his people and sincerity in divine worship. Isaiah is the prophet of faith, he insists the people should trust in God in times of national crisis, by this alone will salvation be attained. Isaiah's hope is that a remnant of the people will recognise the Messiah for its King. This Messiah is to be a descendant of David. A prophet of considerable standing, Isaiah gathered round him a school of disciples who preserved his teaching.

The reading, 8.23-9.3, begins by referring to the humiliating past when Zebulun and Naphtali were overrun by the Assyrian Tiglath-Pileser III and the first deportation that followed in 732, but then comes a change. For those living in darkness 'a light has shone,' deliverance is at hand and the passage goes on to speak of the peaceful reign of a child. This is to be a time of gladness and joy, a time of rejoicing in God's presence, likened by Isaiah to rejoicing at harvest time or sharing the spoils of battle. This joy and happiness will be possible because God will remove the yoke, the rod of their oppressors as he did on the day of Midian when God's servant Gideon overcame the Midianites (see Judges 7,16-25). Now with the coming of Christ these peoples oppressed by the Assyrian king in the past have the light of Christ among them.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 26.1,4,13-14, is a psalm of confidence in God in whose company there is no need to fear so the first verse. The second verse shows this confidence in wishing to live in God's house. In the final verse hoping in the Lord means, 'I shall see the Lord's goodness in the land of the living,' a possible reference to a future life.

The **Second Reading** is from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Paul evangelised the church at Corinth between A.D. 50 and 52. His policy was to establish the Christian faith in a centre of population, and here he chose the great and populous port of Corinth, so that the faith could spread to the whole of the province of Achaia. The Christian community grew strong composed mainly of poor people, but Corinth was a centre of Greek life, philosophy and religions. It was also a notorious centre of immorality which was to cause problems for the newly converted. In 1Corinthians Paul addresses urgent problems that faced the church there and the decisions that had to be made to address these problems such as moral conduct, of marriage and virginity, of liturgical and Eucharistic meetings, of charisms, of matters concerning the Church and the world, appeals to civil courts, eating foods sacrificed to idols. Paul's religious genius enabled him to use all these problems as a vehicle to expound the profound doctrines of Christian liberty, the sanctification of the body, the supremacy of love, union with Christ. Paul teaches the Corinthians that there is only one master, Christ, and only one message, the cross and there is only one true wisdom.

The reading, 1.10-13,17, gives Paul's instruction to the Corinthian community concerning differences that have arisen between them he only wishes them 'to be united again in your belief and practice.' According to Chloe's report there were factions among them each having a prominent member of the faith leading their faction. Paul makes it clear that Christ alone is the person they should be following. The reading concludes with Paul telling them he was sent 'to preach the gospel' but not with human wisdom i.e. not using philosophical words or grand rhetoric which would be unable to express the message of Christ crucified. (Read 2.1-5 below where Paul develops this point.)