

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - C

The gospel reading for this Sunday is the second half of last Sunday's reading. We continue in the Nazareth synagogue and after initially welcoming Jesus' comments on the reading from the prophet Isaiah, some begin to question how Jesus came by all the knowledge he seems to have. Jesus tells the doubters 'no prophet is ever accepted in his own country' and goes on to give two examples. The scene turns ugly and Jesus would seem to call on divine power to extricate himself. The first reading from the prophet Jeremiah is a mirror image of the gospel reading. The second reading continues from 1Corinthians with the well-known and well-loved chapter thirteen on love.

The **First Reading** is from the prophet Jeremiah a major prophet 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 (ch.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, 1.4-5,17-19, is from the beginning of the book when God calls Jeremiah. He is consecrated that is Jeremiah is set apart for the ministry of a 'prophet to the nations.' We are reminded of the words of Jesus to his disciples when he commissions them "teach them to observe all the commands I gave you" at the conclusion of Matthew's gospel. Jeremiah must go and speak God's word fearlessly in spite of the opposition he will meet strengthened in the knowledge that God is with him all the way and will rescue him. Jesus too met opposition and Christians throughout every generation will similarly meet opposition but as God rescued Jeremiah and Jesus from death so will he rescue us.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 70.1-6,15,17, is a perfect response to the reading, admittedly a prayer in old age but the words are a perfect prayer of trust and confidence in God who is my refuge, my rescuer, my shelter, my hope and my lips will tell of his saving justice.

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 source of wisdom, the Spirit.

The reading, 12.31-13.13 is Paul's treatise on love. Having spoken about the gifts of the Spirit in the preceding section of his letter and their proper place in the order of the Christian life, Paul now proceeds to challenge the Corinthians to espouse the highest gift of all, love. He sets down, in this well known passage, a hymn to love. Love has no possessiveness and is not a desire for satisfaction, love wants to satisfy the other. The supreme love is God's love for us that made him give his Son so that we, sinners, might be reconciled and become not only God's chosen ones but God's sons. This love is identical with God's nature it is found in the Son and the Holy Spirit, it is a love which enables us to love friends and enemies and proves that God loves us. It is the new commandment 'love one another; you must love one another just as I have loved you.' The passage needs to be read as a meditation.