

## THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - C

So far Luke has shown us Jesus setting out his stall at Nazareth, to preach the Good News. In today's Gospel reading Jesus calls his first humbled but not reluctant followers, they are to be his close followers while Jesus is on earth and are to preach his message when he returns to the Father. In the first reading we hear how Isaiah has a vision of the all-holy God and though unworthy is purified and becomes God's messenger. In the second reading we have Paul's teaching quite clearly about Christ's resurrection from the dead, 'believing in anything else will not lead to anything.'

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 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, 6.1-9, tells of Isaiah's vision in the Temple of the Lord. God is surrounded by some of his heavenly court who proclaim the holiness of God whose glory fills the earth. Isaiah realises his unworthiness before God and the angel of God brings a burning coal to purify Isaiah's lips that they may be worthy to proclaim God's word. The readiness of Isaiah to accept God's mission recalls the faith of Abraham when God asks him to leave his own country for a land that God will show him, Abraham left immediately. From now on God's holiness is a central theme of Isaiah's teaching, God is the Holy One of Israel and it requires the people to be sanctified and purified from sin. This is surely the basis of the mission of Jesus who lives the holiness of God and who leads the people away from a life of sin.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 137.1-5,7-8, is a hymn of thanksgiving to the all holy God. God is thanked because he has heard the words of my mouth, for his faithfulness and love, because he answered on the day I called so the psalmist says he will bless and adore before God's holy temple. Thanksgiving to God will ring out from all earth's kings because God's right hand will save displaying his glory on earth.

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 Holy Spirit.

The reading, 15.1-11, sets out the beginning of Paul's teaching on the resurrection of the dead. There was considerable resistance to this belief in some sections of Jewish society and among some Christians in Corinth. The Athenians of the Areopagus had laughed at the teaching when Paul addressed them. Paul begins in this letter with the fundamental Christian belief, namely, the paschal mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. The phrases in the reading from: "Well then...in accordance with the scriptures" are not typical of Paul's style of writing which suggests Paul is quoting from the most ancient tradition of the Church about the resurrection appearances, formulae that were learnt by the new converts. Paul supports his teaching by enumerating the appearances of Christ to the disciples after he has risen from the dead and implies that all these witnesses can still attest what they have seen and that their own faith in Christ's resurrection rests on sure witness. Paul ends with a very important statement; "what matters is that I preach what they (the apostles) preach." The Church is founded on the teaching of the apostles who heard the message first hand and received the authority to pass on that message truthfully.