

THE SIXTH SUNDY OF THE YEAR – A

The gospel reading on this Sunday takes us further into Matthew's Sermon on the Mount where Jesus gives several examples to show how by his teaching he will bring the teachings of the Old Law to completion: 'I have come not to abolish them (i.e. the Law and the Prophets) but to complete them.' The first reading from one of the Wisdom Books gives us advice on keeping the law of God. In the second reading we continue with Paul's letter to the Corinthians where Paul tells the Corinthians that it is the hidden wisdom of God that is 'predestined to be for our glory before the ages began.'

The **First Reading** is from the book of Ecclesiasticus, one of the Wisdom books found in the Bible. Written originally in Hebrew and then translated into Greek, it is the Greek text which is recognised by the Church as part of the Canon of Scripture. The subscription at the end of the book reads, "Wisdom of Jesus, son of (Ben) Sira" 51.30. At the beginning of the book is a foreword written by the translator, the grandson of Ben Sira, who translated the book into Greek when he went to settle in Egypt c.132 BC. At the time of writing Palestine was under the dominion of the Seleucids, Greek kings, who imposed a Greek way of life, Hellenisation, on the people. It was against these dangerous innovations that Ben Sira wrote to defend the traditions of Israel. He was a scribe who sought both wisdom and respect for the Law. He had a high regard for the Temple, its liturgy and the priestly office. His thought was nourished by reading the sacred books of Israel, especially the Prophets and Wisdom literature. The form of the book resembles previous wisdom books, lacking any apparent order, but it is traditional in that Wisdom which comes from God is rooted in the fear of the Lord, bringing happiness in its wake. The book's original contribution is in identifying Wisdom with the Law of Moses. Ben Sira meditates on the history of salvation reviewing the great personalities throughout the OT. All the kings of Judah and Israel are variously condemned except David, Hezekiah and Josiah, even Solomon receives a severe verdict, yet, Ben Sira is proud of his people's past, the great figures of history and the wonders God worked through them. He gives prominence to the doctrine of the covenant, the promises God made to his people but does not look forward to the coming of a messiah to deliver his people, this will come from fidelity to the Law. In the meantime he accepts his people's situation under Greek domination with humility and peace.

The reading, 15.16-20, comes from a section which deals with freedom of choice and begins with: "Do not say, 'The Lord was responsible from my sinning'" and so our reading begins: 'If you wish you can keep the commandments...' Other choices are mentioned fire or water, life or death the choice is ours such is the wisdom of God allowing us to have such important choices. The writer reminds us 'vast is the wisdom of the Lord; he is almighty and all-seeing' and God sees all that we do, he never commands us to be godless or to sin. The writer is teaching us to be responsible for all our actions which should be guided by God's Law.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 118.1-2,4-5,17-18,33-34, is a psalm in praise of the divine Law and is one of the most remarkable monuments of Israelite devotion to divine revelation, every verse contains a word which refers to the Law in some way. So our psalm begins by saying fulfilling God's Law brings happiness in life. The remainder of the psalm is in the form of a prayer seeking God's help to observe, obey God's Law.

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.

In the reading 2.6-10 Paul offers 'a wisdom' to the mature i.e. those mature in Christian life and thought. This wisdom is not to be confused with 'a philosophy of our age,' (remember Corinth was a centre of learning), it is the hidden wisdom of God, a mystery in the sense that the object of wisdom is a mystery. This wisdom says Paul 'God predestined to be for our glory,' a wisdom that the learned of this age have never known, if they had 'they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory.' Paul then to some extent clarifies his thoughts saying he teaches what scripture refers to as 'the things that no eye has seen no ear has heard,' things beyond every day thought, what God has prepared for those who love him revealed to us by the Spirit.

