

THE SIXTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – B

On this Sunday we read the story of the healing of a leper. From the moment he opens his mouth the leper shows he has faith in Jesus and therefore he is assured of his healing. However he does not obey the command to silence, asked for by Jesus because Jesus did not want the wrong impression of his ministry to spread everywhere. (The signs given in John's gospel should lead one to ask who is this man that can do such things?) The first reading shows the OT attitude to leprosy, in contrast Jesus has come to set people free. The short second reading encourages us to live our lives 'for the glory of God' following Paul who followed Christ's example.

The **First Reading** is from the book of Leviticus the third book of the Jewish Law after Genesis and Exodus. The book does not continue the narrative of Genesis and Exodus but is a code of laws which began to be collected in Jerusalem shortly before and during the Exile but did not reach its final form until after the Exile, i.e. after 538 BC yet it contains laws of great antiquity going back to the nomadic times. Leviticus was placed in the Pentateuch later by Priestly editors. The book can be divided into four sections: the ritual of sacrifice, 1-7; the investiture of priests, 8-10; the rules concerning clean and unclean, 11-16; the law of holiness 17-26; and an appendix, 27.

The reading, 13.1-2, 44-46, comes from the section of the book which deals with the rules concerning clean and unclean and our gospel reading leads us to expect the reading speaks of leprosy which it does. Inspection of the disease by a priest of Aaron will result in a diagnosis as a result of which the leper must declare himself unclean and because 'cleanness' is related to worship he can take no further part in religious services. Later the prophets insisted on the cleansing of the heart which led the way for Jesus' teaching.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 31.1-2,5,11, while God's forgiveness brings much happiness the second verse shows a candid admission of sin but retains the forgiveness of the opening verses. To admit one's guilt and receive forgiveness gives occasion for much rejoicing.

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 1 Corinthians 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, marriage and virginity, liturgical and Eucharistic meetings, charisms, matters concerning the Church and the world, appeals to civil courts, eating foods sacrificed to idols. Paul's religious genius enabled him to turn use all these problems into a vehicle for the profound doctrine 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 which is the one true wisdom.

The reading, 10.31-11.1, is the conclusion to the section in which Paul has been speaking about food offered to idols. Since idols represent non-existent gods Paul has no problem about eating such food but he says, just before our reading begins, that they should refrain from eating such food if it upsets someone's conscience. Then Paul concludes giving a basic guide line about eating and drinking, 'do it for the glory of God.' We should not be offensive to anyone but always helpful caring for others' needs before our own 'so they might be saved.' His final word; he tells his disciples to follow his example as he has followed Christ. They are to follow Paul's model because the leaders who pass on the teaching must themselves be models whose faith and life are to be imitated.