

## THE TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – B

With this Sunday we return to reading Mark's gospel where he is coming to the end of his account of Jesus' ministry in Galilee. The reading reveals another confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees and some scribes who have come from Jerusalem. Their insistence on the external minutiae of the Law being fulfilled draws strong words from Jesus who quotes Isaiah against them. Rather than external details of the Law Jesus looks at the heart for it is what comes from the heart that can make a person unclean. The first reading is from the book of Deuteronomy where Moses exhorts the people of Israel to listen to what he says, keep the commandments and they will become a wise and prudent nation. The second reading from the letter of St James who urges his readers to accept the word and live by it and this must be affirmed by fulfilling the corporal works of mercy.

**The First Reading** is from the fifth book of the Law, the book of Deuteronomy. This book as the name suggests is a second law book and is distinct from the other four books of the Law in that, apart from chapters 31 and 34, it comes from a single written tradition: the Deuteronomic. This tradition has a distinctive style and its teaching constantly reaffirms that of all nations in the world, God has, out of pure love, chosen Israel to be his people, but this choice and the Covenant made with his people ratifying this choice are conditional on Israel giving allegiance exclusively to God, and to the prescribed worship to be offered to God in one single place of worship. The book is a code of civil and religious laws which are framed within a long discourse of Moses. The concluding chapters deal with the final days of Moses, the commissioning of Joshua to succeed Moses and Moses' death in sight of the Promised Land. The Deuteronomic code is a partial restatement of the laws promulgated in the desert and recalls the great events of Exodus, of Sinai and of the beginnings of the conquest of the Promised Land. Later the principles of Moses were re-thought by the prophets and adapted to the situation of the Israelites living in Palestine 600 years after Moses. After the fall of Samaria, 721, the book was stored away in the Temple in Jerusalem to be rediscovered in the reign of Josiah, 622. It was re-edited at the beginning of the Exile 587 and came to be regarded as a code of law laid down in his final years by Moses in Moab.

The reading, 4.1-2,6-8, comes from the first discourse of Moses. The people of Israel gradually learn the 'laws and customs' of Yahweh which eventually dominate all Israelite religion. These laws and customs will give the Israelites 'wisdom and prudence' which will be admired by other nations, Deuteronomy also brings out God's loving intimacy which is brought to fulfilment in the NT when the Son of God came to dwell among us.

**The Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 14.2-5, is a psalm about Yahweh's guest as the first line indicates. The psalm then goes on to give a summary of moral conduct which is a reflection of the Ten Commandments, thus the psalm is a good response to the first reading.

**The Second Reading** is from the letter of St. James. This is one of the so called universal letters, that is, it is addressed to all Christians and not, as in the Pauline letters, addressed to a particular community. This letter was not widely known at first and only came to be accepted into the canon of New Testament scripture near the end of the fourth century. Who exactly James was, is still uncertain, he is not thought to be either of the two James in the apostolic college. The letter is thought to have been written at the end of the first or the beginning of the second century. The letter is addressed to the 'twelve tribes of the Dispersion' i.e. to Jewish Christians scattered over the Graeco-Roman world. It presumes the readers are familiar with the Old Testament which is not quoted precisely but alluded to in an imprecise fashion. This James is a Judaeo-Christian sage who has rethought the maxims of Jewish Wisdom in the light of Jesus' teachings. The letter is like a sermon advising on how to behave in time of trial, on the origin of temptation, on how to control the tongue, on good relations and sympathy with one's neighbour, and on the power of prayer. There are two main themes in the book, the first praises the poor and threatens the favoured ones; the second insists that Christians must do good works and not be content with a faith that produces nothing. Faith must be related to good works.

The reading, 1.17-18,21-22,27, speaks about receiving the Word of God and putting it into practice, 'by his own choice he gave birth to us by the message of truth.' Consequently we must 'do away with all impurities and remnants of evil (and) humbly welcome the Word.' James goes on to list what we must do: 'Coming to the help of orphans and widows...and keeping oneself uncontaminated by the world.' Good pastoral advice which echoes the thoughts of the first reading and the gospel reading.