

THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – B

The gospel reading this week gives us two miracle stories one sandwiched within the other. Jesus sets out to heal a young girl who is desperately sick, on his way a woman who had suffered from a haemorrhage for twelve years herself initiates her healing by approaching Jesus with faith, she touches his clothes and is healed. Jesus then proceeds to the house of the young girl and heals her. In the first reading Wisdom teaches that death is not part of God's plan, 'God did make man imperishable.' In the second reading Paul speaks about the Corinthian church providing help for the poor of other churches.

The **First Reading** is from the book of Wisdom. The wisdom literature in the Bible comes after the historical books and comprises the books of Job, the Psalms, the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, the Book of Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus. Wisdom literature flourished throughout the ancient East, it treats of the meaning of life and offers a recipe for successful living. Wisdom literature in Israel came from the same soil and was absorbed in the individual and his destiny but was viewed in the clearer light of the religion of Yahweh. Real wisdom is found in the fear of God since God alone is wise. Wisdom is an outpouring of the glory of the Almighty, an image of his perfection. Wisdom is sure to bring happiness and folly, ruin. This is the doctrine on which the teaching of Wisdom is based. All this teaching was preparing for the revelation of Wisdom incarnate as Matthew says: "here is someone greater than Solomon."

The book of Wisdom itself may be divided as follows, the first section, ch.1-5, defines the function of Wisdom in man's destiny; the second section, ch.6-9, treats of the origin and nature of Wisdom; the last section, ch.10-19, celebrates the part played by Wisdom and by God in the history of the chosen people. The authorship is attributed to Solomon, the wisest king in Israel. The author was an Alexandrian Jew who wrote towards the middle of the 1st century B.C., he commends Wisdom, born of God, obtained by prayer, the mainspring of all the virtues. This life is seen as a preparation for another in which the virtuous live with God and the wicked are punished. He sees Wisdom as an attribute of God.

The reading, 1.13-15; 2.23-24, comes from the first part of the book which treats of wisdom and human destiny and speaks of death. The opening sentence makes clear that death is not part of God's plan. The author is thinking of physical death and spiritual death which are interconnected; sin is the cause of death and physical death for the sinner is also spiritual death. God created all things to 'be,' to exist, to have health and a good life because 'in them no fatal poison can be found.' Hades, that is the power of death personified, 'holds no power on earth for virtue is undying.' God made human beings to be immortal, 'he made them as the image of his own nature.' Death introduced by the devil is spiritual death with physical death as its consequence 'as those who belong to him (the devil) find to their cost.'

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 29.2,4-6,11-13, is a prayer of thanksgiving after mortal danger. God is the one who by his plan of salvation can save me from death and oblivion, the psalm thanks God for all he has done 'you have raised my soul from the dead...you have changed my mourning into dancing.'

The **Second Reading** is from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. Paul evangelized the Church at Corinth between 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 2 Corinthians Paul is able to say that the abuses dealt with in his earlier letter had been corrected. In the first, main part of the letter he writes magnificently about the dignity of the apostle's mission. Chapters 8-9 deal with collecting money which he illuminates with the ideal of union between the churches. The final section is in the form of an apologia when he is accused of weakness and ambition.

The reading, 8.7,9,13-15, comes from the section of the letter where Paul is organizing a collection for God's holy people. These are the Christians in Jerusalem who from the earliest days were in need of help. Paul was anxious to have this collection made since he regarded it as a sign and pledge of unity between the churches he had founded and those of the Judaeo-Christian communities in Jerusalem. Paul begins by commending the Corinthians saying they 'have most of everything' and he goes on to list their gifts, consequently Paul expects them 'to put most into this work of mercy too.' The work of mercy is the collection he wishes to be made. Paul then gives the example of Christ who 'although he was rich he became poor for your sake so that you should become rich (i.e. spiritually) through his physical poverty. Paul concludes by giving some practical advice saying that while relieving other people's needs they should not 'leave yourselves in hardship; but there should be a fair balance—your surplus at present may fill their deficit, and another time their surplus may fill your deficit.' He concludes with a quote from Exodus 16.18.