

THE NINTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – B

In the gospel reading we listen to the final two conflict stories in Mark, they are both to do with the Sabbath observance and the Pharisees' opposition to Jesus' teaching but Jesus claims to be 'master even of the Sabbath.' 'The Pharisees went out and at once began to plot with the Herodians against him, discussing how to destroy him.' Mark makes clear even from the beginning of chapter three the likely conclusion to Jesus' ministry. In the first reading we have the teaching from Deuteronomy on the Sabbath observance and the second reading continues with Paul's letter to the Corinthians. The light of God's glory shines in our minds to radiate the knowledge of God's glory and all of the problems life throws at us, even death, are sent 'so that in our mortal flesh the life of Jesus, too, may be openly shown.'

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, 5.12-15, is taken from the Deuteronomic account of the Ten Commandments. Here we have the Law about the Sabbath. After six days of work the seventh day is to be a day of rest for man and beast alike and the reason given is linked to the liberation from slavery in Egypt. It is to be a day of joy recalling God's great deeds and it is a day when servants and foreign slaves are temporarily released from their drudgery, so a day of joy for them too.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 80.3-8,10-11, is a song for the feast of Shelters (wine and olive harvest). The first day of the seventh month was reckoned the first day of the New Year, at the next full moon the feast of Shelters was celebrated. Verse three recalls the burdens faced in Egypt and how God rescued the Israelites and this thought is amplified in the last verse.

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, 4.6-11, talks about the hardships of the Christian life. The key to the reading comes from the opening sentence, God says, 'Let there be light shining out of darkness.' God has shone his light into the darkness of our minds so that they can 'radiate the light of the knowledge of God's glory.' Paul says 'we are only the earthenware jars that hold this treasure' and then goes on to mention all the difficulties we face but we are 'never cornered...never despair...never deserted...never killed; through all these problems 'we carry in our bodies the death of Jesus.' Why? 'So that the life of Jesus, too, may be seen in our bodies.' This is why 'we are consigned to death every day, for the sake of Jesus.' Paul is teaching us that suffering is an integral part of the Christian vocation.