

## THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT - B

In Advent the readings lead us to think about two advents (comings) of Christ, firstly the second coming and then as we draw nearer to Christmas we think about the first coming. Following last Sunday's reading about the last judgement this first reading from Mark warns us to be ready, to stay awake because we do not know when the Lord will come again. The first reading from the third part of Isaiah begs the Lord to come. 'Oh, that you would tear the heavens open and come down...' Paul, in the second reading encourages the Corinthians to be thankful 'for all the graces you have received....while you are still waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.'

The **First Reading** comes from the third part of Isaiah. The work, Isaiah 56-66, is a composite collection, its various parts dating from before the end of the Exile, 538 B.C., to the rebuilding of the Temple in 520 B.C. Taken as a whole this last part of the book of Isaiah seems to be the work of Second Isaiah's disciples composed sometime after the return from exile. It can be considered the final product of the Isaian tradition, active from the days of the great eighth century prophet himself.

The reading, 63.16-17, 64.1.3-8, is part of a meditation on the history of Israel in the form of a supplicatory psalm. There are references to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 587 BC which shows the memory of that catastrophe was still very fresh. The appeal to past history conforms to Deuteronomic theology: God punishes his rebellious people then rescues them. The supplication begins at v.15 the most earnest being two references to the fatherhood of God, our reading begins with one of these references, 'You, Lord, yourself are our Father, Our Redeemer is your ancient name.' In the psalm the writer beseeches God to come again to his people, 'Oh that you would tear the heavens open and come down.' This God guides faithfully those 'who act with integrity' but punishes those who are sinners. The reading ends with beautiful lines of confidence in God reasserting God's fatherhood and 'we are the work of your hand' a wonderful meditative reading for the beginning of Advent.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 79.2-3,15-16,18-19, picks up the idea of God as our shepherd from last Sunday and then reiterates the thoughts expressed in the first reading about God coming from on high to help and protect us.

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 the one true wisdom.

The reading, 1.3-9, comes from the very beginning of the letter. First there is the address and greeting to the Corinthians and this followed by a thanksgiving, 'I am continually thanking God about you.' Paul thanks God for the graces they have received 'you are not lacking in any gift as you wait for Our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.' Paul then assures his Corinthian converts that Christ Jesus 'will continue to give you strength till the very end' that is until the 'Day of our Lord Jesus Christ.' This Day will be the final stage in the history of salvation, the Day when our Lord Jesus Christ comes again, the second coming. Paul concludes by saying they can rely on God who has called them 'to be partners with his Son Our Lord Jesus Christ.' This reading reveals the deep faith and confidence Paul has in the message he is preaching.