**14th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C**

**3rd July 2022**

**Reading Isaiah 66:10-14c**

This reading comes from a late library of writings which had been grouped with miscellaneous older ones in the possession of disciples from Isaiah’s ‘school’ Originally this poetic prophecy spoke of the joy following the restoration of God's people from exile. The exiles were of the third generation and had been brought up on nostalgic stories of an idyllic past but also needed persuading to leave their comfortable life in the fertile Euphrates valley for an untried life in the rocky mountains of Canaan.

The reading is part of a longer (66:1-16) poem written during this return. The poet is convinced that repopulation of Jerusalem must herald the last age. It is a summons to all who love her to rejoice over the glory that will be hers. The author of our passage pictures Jerusalem as a mother who consoles her children at her breasts and dandles them on her lap. It is a moving image of peace, contentment and love but we must not overlook the fact that the author confidently uses a female image to illustrate the nature of God. 'Like a son comforted by his mother, so I will comfort you'. We can rightly speak of the mother-love of God. See also Isaiah 49:14-15. This is an aspect that even to-day some find difficult to embrace.

The Missal rubric for this week is Christ Our Peace, and the word for peace may be found in all three readings. The first of these, of course, is in Hebrew, and means vastly more than the other two examples which are in Greek. Shalom means ‘wholeness’ and embraces prosperity, even material wealth which was the principal aspiration of the exiles. The Greek ‘eirené’ however meant much the same as our ‘peace’ i.e. simply an absence of conflict, which, ironically was what the early Christians longed for most of all.

This reading, however, is still appropriate for the post-Pentecost season, in which the Church enjoys the fruits of redemption, particularly the gift of the Spirit. Like the other hymns on Jerusalem in this latter part of Isaiah, this one too prepares for the image of the heavenly Jerusalem in the New Testament (e.g., Galatians 4:26; Revelation 3:12; 21:2-4).

**Responsorial Psalm: 66:1-3a, 4-7a, 16, 20**

This is a psalm of thanksgiving for a national deliverance, pictured in imagery derived from the original Exodus: "He turned the sea into dry land; men passed through the river on foot." The prophecies of Second Isaiah spoke of the return from exile in these terms, so the psalm forms a good response for the first reading. It is a thanksgiving for all the blessings of redemption and for us particularly for the gift of the Spirit.

**Reading II: Galatians 6:14-18**

It was standard practice to dictate letters to an amanuensis, (a professional scribe) who would be found sitting at a desk in the street outside his house. Having first dictated the bulk of the letter, it was customary for Paul to then take the pen himself and add a few concluding words. In these words he summarized and underlined the message of the whole letter.

Its purpose was to dissuade his Gentile converts from lapsing into syncretism. They had fallen under the influence of Jewish Christians and Paul has to remind them that anyone who gets circumcised is obligated to keep the whole law, which would have been expected practice for converts to Judaism.

What matters for Paul is that Christians have entered a new existence, and in this new existence it is not the marks of circumcision that matter but the evidence of new life. It is unspoken here but Paul has in mind Baptism which came to replace circumcision as the entry into the people of God. Paul refers to the ‘marks on his body’ as evidence of his membership.

Paul's glorying in the cross is not empty rhetoric; he bears the physical scars of his discipleship (v. 17). The marks (Greek is 'stigmata') are not metaphorical but very real, wrought by illness (4:13), flogging (Acts 16:22), stoning (Acts 14:19) - all for the sake of Christ. See 2 Corinthians 11:23-29.

Finally, he gives his readers a blessing in a style that suggests that his letters were written to be read aloud at a celebration of the Eucharist. This is even more clear in other letters (e.g. I Corinthians 16;19-20)

**Gospel: Luke 10:1-12, 17-20 (long form); 10:1-9 (short form)**

All three synoptic Gospels record a mission of the Twelve Apostles (Matthew 9;35 & 10;1-14, Mark 6;6-13 & Luke 9;1-6) during Jesus' earthly ministry. The follow-up mission of seventy disciples is only found in Luke.

There can be little doubt that the number seventy is symbolic. The mission of the Twelve represented the Church's mission to Israel, because there were twelve tribes. It follows then, that the mission of the seventy is the subsequent mission to the nations of the world, which, according to Jewish tradition, numbered seventy or seventy two depending on which manuscripts you read.

Some critics maintain that the whole idea of Gentile missions during Jesus’ earthly ministry is unhistorical and was only conceived to justify the later admission of Gentiles into Jewish communities.

On the other hand, it is noteworthy that the disciples are charged to proclaim Jesus' own message: "The kingdom of God has come near to you," in his colloquial style. It is not the challenging language of the post-Easter Church.

Yet, we must not overlook the obvious fact that every word in the New Testament comes to us only because of the Resurrection. If the disciples were not convinced that he had risen from the dead, then we would never have had his teaching either. But it would have been perfectly possible to recall real events that had happened before the Crucifixion, but impossible to remember their significance apart from the light that the Resurrection later shed upon them.

Also, it is neither the disciples nor is it the Church that initiates the mission. The initiative comes from the Lord of the harvest in response to the Church's prayer.

And, afterwards, when the disciples return from their mission elated by their success, Jesus moderates their enthusiasm: "Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

The tone of mission is characterized by urgency and detachment. Urgency was necessary because of the Lord’s imminent return and detachment as a result of the worldliness of the neighbours. To-day both features have been diluted to the point of ineffectiveness, but in some form or other, urgency and detachment must always motivate the Church's mission.

The warning (v. 4) is not to waste time on elaborate civilities. The Jewish greeting ‘Shalom’ is sufficient. The phrase (v. 6) 'son of peace' is a Hebrew/Aramaic idiom meaning ‘One worthy of peace’. Food and shelter (v. 7) are not charitable alms but wages (see 1 Corinthians 9:14).

The mission is not a private or optional sally but a public proclamation of the kingdom. The kingdom is near, so they are not to waste time on those who will not receive them; the message must be brought to others (vv. 10-11). The unreceptive town (v. 12) will not go unpunished; 'on that day' means on the day of judgment.

The ability to cast out demons had, understandably, made a deep impression on the disciples (v. 17). The power had come to them from Jesus (v. 19) and it is by their faith in him that they have been successful.

The real cause for rejoicing is that the kingdom has dawned; for Satan it is the beginning of the end - his fall will be lightning fast (see John 12:31). The disciples have received power over the enemy of humankind in all fields (v. 19); serpents and scorpions (though these may have a metaphorical sense, see Psalm 91:13) exemplify evils in nature, the work of Satan (see Acts 28:3-6).

The assurance of being numbered among the elect is the ultimate reason for rejoicing (v. 20). The image of the 'book of life' is a common Old Testament one (see also Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15).