

**OPENING COLLECT**

Almighty God, who alone can bring order to the unruly wills and passions of sinful humanity: give your people grace so to love what you command and to desire what you promise, that, among the many changes of this world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

**FIRST READING: Deuteronomy 30.15-20**

<sup>15</sup> See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. <sup>16</sup> If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. <sup>17</sup> But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, <sup>18</sup> I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. <sup>19</sup> I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, <sup>20</sup> loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

More from the Sermon on the Mount, and, this week, the stress is on the difference between keeping to the rules, in your life, and being motivated by unselfish love. The passage from Deuteronomy is usually described as being part of the Sermon of Moses to the People of God, before they entered the Promised Land (see Deut. 26.1, 27.1, etc.). Here, he comes to a conclusion in a way. He has rehearsed all that God expects from the people if they wish to live well and long in the land. Now he challenges them to make the choice. The key is in v.19, and the effect of this is spelt out in v.20. The choice is theirs, as it is ours. Did they, and do we, want to live in relationship with God or not? The problem, as can be seen from a wider reading of the Scriptures, was that the People of God were all too human, and it was easy to lose sight of what God required- a life of unselfish love. They were challenged not just to keep the Law (observing his commandments), but to love God and walk in his ways (v.16).

**Epistle: Corinthians 3.1-9**

<sup>1</sup> Brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. <sup>2</sup> I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, <sup>3</sup> for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? <sup>4</sup> For when one says, 'I belong to Paul,' and another, 'I belong to Apollos,' are you not merely human? <sup>5</sup> What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. <sup>6</sup> I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. <sup>7</sup> So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

Paul seems to be facing similar problems to those Moses was anxious about. The people may have turned to God, as a result of his work among them (last week's Epistle), but they soon appear all too human- infants in Christ who were not ready for solid food: they had a lot to learn! Walking the way of love, the way of Christ, is not simple. The disciple has to make an effort to live a self-giving life for the sake of others, and can be easily diverted from the way of love, and fall into jealousy and quarrelling. So, Paul goes on to tell them, they need to remember that their ministers all have an important role in their lives. They must all work together. Growing the church is like growing a crop: one plants and another waters and God gives the growth (v.8).

**Epistle continued:** <sup>8</sup> The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labour of each. <sup>9</sup> For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

The Christian community needs to grow in the Spirit and those responsible for us are working together in God's field, God's building.

### **Gospel: Matthew 5.21-37**

On the mountain, Jesus gathered his disciples around him and taught them, saying: <sup>21</sup> 'You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, "You shall not murder"; and "whoever murders shall be liable to judgement."' <sup>22</sup> But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgement; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, "You fool," you will be liable to the hell of fire. <sup>23</sup> So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. <sup>25</sup> Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. <sup>26</sup> Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. <sup>27</sup> You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery." <sup>28</sup> But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. <sup>29</sup> If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. <sup>30</sup> And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell. <sup>31</sup> It was also said, "Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce." <sup>32</sup> But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. <sup>33</sup> Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, "You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord." <sup>34</sup> But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, <sup>35</sup> or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. <sup>36</sup> And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. <sup>37</sup> Let your word be "Yes, Yes" or "No, No"; anything more than this comes from the evil one.'

In last week's Gospel passage, Jesus introduced today's theme. . He was talking to people who had grown up in the Jewish tradition, but his challenging, demanding teaching must not be seen as against the Law, which had dominated their religious and social life. The Law was being fulfilled, he said, when people responded to his teaching, for the response of love cannot be predetermined by the Law. Rules may guide us but they only take us so far. The Christian life is not just about keeping rules; it is about going one step further for the sake of the other person. Take the seventh commandment- you shall not murder. Not many will be guilty of that, but Jesus is suggesting that just being angry with another person can diminish both of you. Christians need to lead the way in establishing reconciliation and peace, that all may flourish. Our task is to build one another up in love, not walk the way of the flesh, the way of the world. This may be hard teaching but it makes sense if we are to be Kingdom people.

### **Post-Communion Collect**

Merciful Father, who gave Jesus Christ to be for us the bread of life, that those who come to him should never hunger: draw us to the Lord in faith and love, that we may eat and drink with him at his table in the kingdom, where he is alive and reigns, now and for ever. **Amen**