

**OPENING COLLECT**

Merciful God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as pass our understanding: pour into our hearts such love toward you that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; 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: Isaiah 44.6-8**

Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. <sup>7</sup> Who is like me? Let them proclaim it, let them declare and set it forth before me. Who has announced from of old the things to come? Let them tell us what is yet to be. <sup>8</sup> Do not fear, or be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? You are my witnesses! Is there any god besides me? There is no other rock; I know not one.

Or **Wisdom 12.13,16-19**

A brief passage from Second Isaiah (C.6<sup>th</sup>.B.C.), who developed a strong doctrine of the omnipotent creator God, at a time when the People of God were suffering in exile in Babylon. Life was not good and they were short on hope! Isaiah was asserting that, whatever appearances might suggest, God is to be trusted. There is no other like him; he is the rock on which the future can be built.

The alternative set passage (Wisdom 12.13,16-19) is a passage in similar vein, but goes deeper into the relationship between God and mankind. This is the god who 'judges with mildness' and 'governs with forbearance'; his loving kindness (Heb. HESED) lies at the heart of mankind's righteousness!

**SECOND READING: Romans 8.12-25**

<sup>12</sup> Brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh – <sup>13</sup> for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

<sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. <sup>15</sup> For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' <sup>16</sup> it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ – if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

<sup>18</sup> I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; <sup>20</sup> for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> We know that the whole

Strangely, although the Epistle passage is not linked by theme with the Gospel, as is the passage from the Scriptures, Paul is making a similar point to Isaiah.

As we have seen over the last few weeks, Paul is speaking, in Romans, to young Christians, young, that is to say, in the faith, and he is encouraging them to have a confident trust in the power of God to save, so that, through Jesus Christ, they may walk through life in love, free from the burden of the Law. Indeed, he says, if you really walk 'in the Spirit', trusting God, then you may be able to live the sort of life that the Law was pointing towards, a life of love. So, you need to be saved to keep the Law! But Paul goes further than this in today's excerpt. He links our faltering steps, along the way of love, with the need for the whole of creation to find its fulfilment. "The creation, he says, waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God" (v.19).

Now, it is easy to read all of this in the context of

**Epistle continued**

creation has been groaning in labour pains until now;<sup>23</sup> and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

<sup>24</sup> For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

the ‘after life’, and Paul did believe that he was working in ‘the last days’, when God would create ‘the new heaven and the new earth’; the harvest in our Gospel parable. However, it is important to realise that we need, as the early Christians needed, to hold on to that hope, but to see that we are engaged **now**, in the ongoing process of salvation. Hang in there, live by love and work for good!

**Gospel: Matthew 13.24–30, 36–43**

<sup>24</sup> Jesus put before the crowd another parable:

‘The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field;<sup>25</sup> but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away.

<sup>26</sup> So when the plants came up and bore grain then the weeds appeared as well.

<sup>27</sup> And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, “Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?”

<sup>28</sup> He answered, “An enemy has done this.” The slaves said to him, “Then do you want us to go and gather them?” <sup>29</sup> But he replied, “No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them.

<sup>30</sup> Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.”

<sup>36</sup> Then Jesus left the crowds and went into the house.

And his disciples approached him, saying, ‘Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.’

<sup>37</sup> He answered, ‘The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; <sup>38</sup> the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, <sup>39</sup> and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age,

and the reapers are angels. <sup>40</sup> Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. <sup>41</sup> The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, <sup>42</sup> and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>43</sup> Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!’

Following on from the well-known parable of ‘The Sower’, which, as we saw last week, is about the very varied ways in which people respond to the word of God, today’s Gospel parable speaks of the nature of the Kingdom that is coming into being, as the word is proclaimed. When you, yourself, have discovered that God is good, and that the way of love, the way walked by Christ, is the key to new life, not just for yourself, but, potentially, for all, then you do wonder why more people cannot grasp what is on offer, and why there is still so much evil, hatred and sadness in the world. The answer is that God’s new creation is not to replace the former one. It is to be a beacon of light, savoury salt, in the midst of it. The more powerfully that light glows, the more effective the salt, the more powerful the leaven in the lump, then the more the whole creation stops groaning and moves towards the fulfilment of its potential. We may not seem to be winning, the light may be dim in some places, but we are called to ‘hang in there’, in hope and trust, and not to doubt the power of the God who has called us. In the end God is in charge. There may be judgement, but our job, surely, is to play our part in making sure more are good wheat; to play our part in bringing in the Kingdom.

**Post-Communion Collect:**

God of our pilgrimage,  
you have led us to the living water:  
refresh and sustain us  
as we go forward on our journey,  
in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord  
. Amen.