



Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
† Sunday 19th February 2017

In England and Wales

Cycle of Prayer – Openness to God's Word

Keynote: The law of Christ is the way of compassion and love

The Book of Leviticus 19: 1-2, 17-18

The Lord God commands: *'Speak to the whole community of the sons of Israel.'* Just as the faithful assemble today to listen to God's word and to reflect on the meaning for their own lives and the life of the community, so at God's command, Moses assembles the men, women and children of Israel in the desert to teach them about God's way. *'Be holy, for I am the Lord your God, am holy... You must not bear hatred for your brother in your heart... you must not exact vengeance... you must love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord.'* It seems the community of nations has still a lot to learn about God's compassion and the way of love.

Responsorial Psalm 102 (103) – A song in praise of God's love

First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians 3: 16-23

The apostle Paul, writing to the rather dissolute disciples in Corinth, speaks of God's love and its impact upon their lives: *'Didn't you realise that you are God's temple and that the Spirit of God was living in you? If anybody should destroy the temple of God, God will destroy him, because the temple of God is sacred; and you are that temple.'* Yes, the apostle is reminding his converts that the holiness of God is within them, and that they must live accordingly. *'Make no mistake... if anyone thinks of himself as wise, in the ordinary sense of the word, then he must learn to be a fool before he can be wise... because the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God.'* In the end Paul urges his readers to remember: *'You belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God.'* Paul wants us all to have that sense that the Spirit of God is living in us and that we are God's temple.

Gospel according to Matthew 5: 38-48

The evangelist continues by contrasting the prescriptions and the 'do not's' of the Law of the Old Testament with the new Covenant – the New Law of Christ, for Jesus said to his disciples: *'You have learnt how it was said: an eye for eye and tooth for tooth. But I say to you: offer the wicked no resistance... if a man takes you to law and would have your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.'* We may wonder at the wisdom of this behaviour in our competitive world, but Jesus is emphasising the importance of the underlying message: *'Give to anyone who asks, and if anyone wants to borrow, do not turn him away... You have learnt how it was said: You must love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say this to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; in this way you will be sons of your Father in heaven.'* Yes! The new commandment is one of compassion and love, not of hatred and revenge. It is quite a challenge, but the way of Christ, the way of mercy is just that, as Jesus says: *'You must therefore be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect.'*

© Peter J Harrison 2017