

Reflection for the Twenty-Eight Sunday of the Church's Year

Peace of mind – and indeed of heart – anchored in a deep faith in God!

I don't often set aside the gospel to preach on the other readings but today I am going to do that because there is a golden thread, somewhat hidden away, which unites our other readings, and which has an important message for all ages, and it is this. Peace of mind and of heart are best achieved when they are anchored in a deep faith in God.

In our first reading Isaiah offers a vision to people who are suffering, oppressed and intimidated by more powerful neighbours with imperial ambitions. They are living through a time of distress. Isaiah the prophet offers them a vision of a time when *"the Lord of hosts"* will make on the mount of Jerusalem *"a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine"* and when he will *"swallow up death for ever."* Significantly, he then goes on to say: *"it will be said on that day, 'behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us'."* During the time of distress, suffering and oppression the people of Jerusalem must not lose heart or faith in God. They must wait with faith and confidence because God will act. Even in their oppression they can have peace of mind and heart if they can put their trust in God and wait faithfully on him.

In the psalm – the most famous of all psalms – the writer is in need of repose, his soul is in need of reviving. He is walking in the valley of the shadow of death, surrounded by evil. His foes are within sight. But he is able to express his peace of mind and heart because he allows the Lord to be his shepherd and to lead him in fresh and green pastures towards restful waters. He feels no evil in the valley of the shadow of death because God is with him. The writer finds peace of mind and heart in times of trial because he has anchored his faith in God.

And in our second reading St Paul is a prisoner, having been arrested and transported to Rome for trial. Paul knows that, if he is found guilty, he will be put to death. Under a form of house arrest, he could be tempted to panic, to depression, to despair but he is still able to write to the people of Philippi about the inner peace he has achieved because of his deep trust in God. This is particularly evident in his words, *"I can do all things through him who strengthens me....my God will supply every need...according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."*

Isaiah, the author of our psalm, and St Paul all enjoy a deep inner peace of mind and heart and they want to share the secret of this peace with those around them. They experience this peace because of their deep faith and trust in God. We too can face many challenges in life, suffer many blows, have to live with great uncertainties and big worries. Our inner peace will be more assured in these times if it is anchored in a deep faith in God.