

(B17) SUNDAY 17 OF THE YEAR

(JULY 24TH, 2021)

Readings: 2 Kings 4:42 – 44; Ps. 144 (145):10,11,15-18; Ephesians 4:1 – 6; John 6: 1 – 15.

Today's reading from the letter to the Ephesians jumps over chapter 3, in which we are taught about Paul's ministry of *proclaiming to the pagans the infinite treasure of Christ*. That chapter concludes with a prayer that the readers / hearers of the letter will know *the love of Christ which is beyond all knowledge* and so be *filled with the utter fulness of God*.

From the heights of this exalted language about the spiritual state of believers the letter moves to simpler, practical questions of Christian behaviour.

The link is the single word **Therefore**: it is because of the Christian's status as one who has been *chosen in Christ* and *stamped with the seal of the Holy Spirit* (chapter 1 verses 4 & 13), that the writer must *implore you to live a life worthy of your vocation*.

The first aspect of the life to which the writer calls us is the unity of all who share the same vocation. This is not a matter of just going to worship and putting up with our fellow worshippers: our attitude to them is to be one of *complete selflessness*. To emphasise the importance of this attitude of mutual charity the letter lists the things all Christians have in common. They are:

One Body, One Spirit, One Hope;

One Lord – that is Jesus Christ – One Faith, One Baptism; and

One God, over all, through all, in all.

These lines may have their origin in a chant – perhaps one used in the rite of Baptism. They are a reminder to all Christians that, beneath the divisions between one group of believers and another, there is a fundamental unity, which it is our duty to express in a common life.

In the verses which follow today's reading we move from the fundamentals which all Christians share to the varied gifts of ministry to the whole Body. These gifts of the ascended Lord to his Church are: - apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

This section of the letter concludes with the reminder that the purpose of these various gifts is, not to give more dignity or power to the different kinds of leader, but is *for the equipping of the saints* – that is all of God's holy people – *for the work of ministry, for the building up of the Body of Christ*.

Later readings from this letter will deal with other aspects of Christian conduct.