

Readings: *Genesis 18: 1 – 10; Psalm 14 (15); Colossians 1:24 – 28; Luke 10: 38 – 42.*

There are a few verses between the end of last Sunday's reading from Paul's letter to the Colossians and the beginning of today's. In them Paul reminds his readers that the truth that Christ *made peace by his death on the cross* (verse 20) is true for them – provided they *continue in the faith and the hope of the gospel* of which he *became a minister*.

In today's reading the apostle goes on to speak further of his ministry, of *God's purpose*, and of what the Colossians already experience.

He begins: *It makes me happy to suffer for you, as I am suffering now, and in my body to do what I can to make up all that has still to be undergone by Christ for the sake of his body, the Church.*

The words '*as I am suffering now*' refer to Paul's imprisonment (see chapter 4) probably in Rome.

It is the following phrases which have caused difficulty to some readers. They ask, first, how, if Christ's suffering of death on the cross was sufficient to *reconcile...everything in heaven and...on earth*, anything further has *still to be undergone by Christ*, and secondly, even if this is necessary, how the suffering of Paul (or any other Christian) can *make up* that further suffering.

The answer to both questions lies in Paul's understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ and all Christians as members (that is limbs or organs) of that Body, of which the crucified and risen Christ is the Head.

The members of Christ's mystical Body the church share in the suffering and death of Christ the head. Paul was convinced that shared in that death, so in his letter to the Galatians (2:20) he writes: *I have been crucified with Christ*. We shall hear more of this theme next Sunday.

But today's reading speaks of the complementary truth – that as we share in Christ's sufferings, he shares in ours. So the sufferings of Christians to the end of time are *making up all that has still to be undergone by Christ*.

In one of his *Choruses from 'The Rock'* TS Eliot wrote:

The Son of Man was not crucified once and for all...

But the Son of Man is crucified always

And there shall be Martyrs and Saints.