

## OLAS SCRIPTURE COMMENTARIES JULY 2024

Sunday 7th July **FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

**First Reading Ezekiel 2:2-5** - The readings at Sunday Mass are chosen so that the first, nearly always taken from the Old Testament, is in some way related to that day's Gospel reading. Today the common theme is rejection. The prophets of the Old Testament were well used to being ignored and rejected as they carried out their principle role of making a judgement on present conditions from which consequences could be predicted. Ezekiel was active during the time of the Exile in Babylon in the 6th century BC. the leaders of the nation were prisoners in Babylon. It must have been a time of deep despondency and rejection of traditional religion. Ezekiel knows all this but is compelled to proclaim the truth as he sees it under God's inspiration.

**Second Reading II Corinthians 12: 7-10** - What was the affliction Paul says was put on him to stop him becoming too big-headed? Suggestions have ranged from physical ailments to some form of mental illness. Whatever it was, Paul is able to make use of it, after a fashion, by saying that his very weakness makes the power of Christ in him all the more evident. In other words, people should judge him by the content of his teaching, not for his less than imposing presence.

**Gospel Mark 6:1-6** - Faith, or the lack of it, is a reoccurring theme in the work of Jesus as described by Mark. *Who does he think he is?* we can hear the people in the synagogue saying to one another. *His mother comes the well every day just like all the other women, his dad was the village handyman, and we all used to play together when we were kids.* They could only see the familiar figure, couldn't listen to what he had to say. We need to remember the author of the Gospel ("Mark" is the name attached to the Gospel by others: we really don't know who he was) was writing for a small Christian community - it is suggested in Rome - very likely feeling uncertain it itself under a degree of persecution. They would need to be reminded of the need to have faith in Jesus' words and works

Sunday 14th July **FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

**First Reading Amos 7:12-15** - Amos (a southerner from Judah, he was a shepherd and pruner of fig trees, by no means a professional prophet) wasn't acceptable to the priests of the northern shrine of Bethel because unlike them he denounced the materialistic lifestyle of the northern kingdom, and their rulers' contempt for basic justice while continuing with their ostentatious rituals of sacrifice and temple worship. "You don't want me?" he asks, "Well, I never wanted to be a prophet, don't fancy the job at all. I don't want to be here and would rather clear off back home, but I can't help myself – this is what God has told me to do!

**Second Reading Ephesians 1:3-14** - The whole of this passage is a hymn of praise and glory to God and what he has brought about in us through Christ – a work which was the Divine plan from the beginning of all things. Some later Christians developed this theme of "selection from all eternity" into a doctrine of predestination – that God has chosen certain people for salvation and condemned others. But the author here is referring to the people of Israel, to whom God chose to reveal himself and who pinned their hopes on God's saving power. This saving power is now extended to all who have heard the good news and have accepted it. We need to remember that Paul, like all the first Christian was Jewish: when challenged about his fidelity to his religion he wasn't afraid to declare himself to be a Pharisees. The believers in Jesus didn't call themselves Christians - it was a sort of nickname given to them by outsiders.

**Gospel Mark 6:7-13** - The mission of the twelve is prophetic. Like Amos, who was impelled to preach whether or not he was wanted, they are to proclaim the Good News regardless of the outcome. Note that the Twelve (representative of the twelve tribes of Israel) are sent out to their fellow Jews and they are given some of the same authority Jesus had. The sense of urgency – an abiding feature of Mark's gospel – is heightened by his instruction to make no preparations for their travels, no cash in their pockets, no handy knapsack full of home comforts, not even a spare jersey, just a walking stick to help them on their way (and ward off village dogs!). If anyone welcomes them, they are to accept what is offered; if they are given a cold welcome, too bad.

## Sunday 21st July **SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

**First Reading Jeremiah 23:1-6** - The "shepherds" Jeremiah castigates are the kings of Israel and Judah who have not lived up to their tasks. National disaster at the hands of foreign conquerors will be the result. The whole people, North and the South, will be ruined. But the prophet utters the messianic prediction of a king who will restore the people, a saviour, to lead them and protect them. Jeremiah was looking forward to someone in the near future but as time went on and the nation experienced further degradation the oracle became an expression of the expectation among the faithful of a future Messiah, a God-sent Saviour.

**Second Reading Ephesians 2:13-18** - The author, no doubt a disciple of the apostle, is writing to a largely non-Jewish Christian community in Ephesus. In Jewish tradition, mixing with pagans was at very least discouraged. Now Christ, through his sacrifice, has healed the separation between Jew and Gentile, has brought into being a new creation that makes no distinction between people who were at one time enemies, making them one people, sharing in his promises.

**Gospel Mark 6:30-34** - The Twelve need to recuperate after their missionary journeys described in last Sunday's Gospel reading but solitude was hard to come by and they are pursued by crowds eager to hear something that will give meaning to their lives. John's gospel describes Jesus as the Good Shepherd: here the title is implied. We need to remember that the Middle Eastern shepherd lived with his animals, accompanied them always, to lead them and protect them.

## Sunday 28th July **SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

**First Reading II Kings 4:42-44** - This is the last of a series of miracles stories demonstrating the power of Elisha, the disciple of the great prophet Elijah: the starving are fed, a dead boy is raised to life, a poisoned meal is rendered innocuous. Then someone brings a sacrificial offering to the shrine, the first fruits of the harvest, and is told to serve it to the hundred servants of the shrine. Despite the protest that there is not enough to go round, the food is distributed and there is some left over – which is the reason for this choice of reading today.

**Second Reading Ephesians 4:1-6** - The tone of this passage indicates that all was not well in the Christian community at Ephesus. Last week's reading referred specifically to the largely non-Jewish element in the community. There is more than a hint of animosity between the two - Jewish and Gentile. The author implores his readers to display in their relationship with one another the unity to which they are called through their religious faith. The final sentence of the passage reads like a fragment from a liturgical formula, possibly a hymn. There has always been difficulty in interpreting the Christian message and, far too often, animosity and hatred between the different versions.

**Gospel John 6:1-15** - Today, and for the next few Sundays, we leave Mark's gospel and use chapter six of John's gospel, the long and highly significant discourse that follows on from the feeding of the five thousand. The Twelve protest that they are unable to feed the multitude but in Jesus' hands the insignificant offering becomes enough to feed everyone, with twelve hampers of scraps left over. With the first reading in mind, it becomes obvious that this is not simply an account of a happening, however extraordinary. John intends this to be a piece of teaching. Jesus' mission is to the whole of Israel – the twelve tribes, already symbolised by his choice of an inner circle of twelve disciples. The needs of the people are not fed from nothing - some small token comes from among them but is transformed by Jesus to become a superabundant nourishment. But this is only the beginning, and the enthusiasm of the crowd is for immediate and material satisfaction. Look forward to the next episode as a TV trailer might say!