

9th Sunday of the Year C

*Would you say it is men's approval I am looking for?
If I still wanted that, I should not be what I am –
a servant of Christ. (Ga 1:10)*



First Reading

1 Kings 8:41-43

Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord and, stretching out his hands towards heaven, said:

"And the foreigner too, not belonging to your people Israel, if he comes from a distant country for the sake of your name – for men will hear of your name, of your mighty hand and outstretched arm – if he comes and prays in this Temple, hear from heaven where your home is, and grant all the foreigner asks, so that all the peoples of the earth may come to know your name and, like your people Israel, revere you, and know that your name is given to the Temple I have built."

Second Reading

Galatians 1:1-2.6-10

From Paul to the churches of Galatia, and from all the brothers and sisters who are here with me, an apostle who does not owe his authority to men or his appointment to any human being but who has been appointed by Jesus Christ and by God the Father who raised Jesus from the dead.

I am astonished at the promptness with which you have turned away from the one who called you and have decided to follow a different version of the Good News. Not that there can be more than one Good News; it is merely that some troublemakers among you want to change the Good News of Christ; and let me warn you that if anyone preaches a version of the Good News different from the one we have already preached to you, whether it be ourselves or an angel from heaven, he is to be condemned. I am only repeating what we told you before: if anyone preaches a version of the Good News different from the one you have already heard, he is to be condemned. So now whom am I trying to please – man, or God? Would you say it is men's approval I am looking for? If I still wanted that, I should not be what I am – a servant of Christ.

When Jesus had come to the end of all he wanted the people to hear, he went into Capernaum. A centurion there had a servant, a favourite of his, who was sick and near death. Having heard about Jesus he sent some Jewish elders to him to ask him to come and heal his servant. When they came to Jesus they pleaded earnestly with him, "He deserves this of you," they said "because he is friendly towards our people; in fact, he is the one who built the synagogue." So Jesus went with them, and was not very far from the house when the centurion sent word to him by some friends: "Sir," he said "do not put yourself to trouble; because I am not worthy to have you under my roof; and for this same reason I did not presume to come to you myself; but give the word and let my servant be cured. For I am under authority myself, and have soldiers under me; and I say to one man: Go, and he goes: to another: Come here, and he comes; to my servant: Do this, and he does it." When Jesus heard these words he was astonished at him and, turning round, said to the crowd following him, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found faith like this." And when the messengers got back to the house they found the servant in perfect health.

Meditation

On two occasions does the gospel report that Jesus showed astonishment. In both cases the issue was faith. Among his own people at Nazareth Jesus could work no miracle, and their lack of faith astonished him. At Capernaum he is astonished by the extraordinary faith of a centurion: "I have never found so much faith among the Israelites."

At Nazareth he is dealing with Israelites who have the Law and the Prophets. At Capernaum he is confronted with a foreigner in the midst of the people of the covenant. Jesus is amazed at the incredulity of the one and the faith of the other. Because the hearts of the people in Nazareth remain closed to Jesus' word, their unbelief hinders his work. On the other hand, the centurion, although he is beyond the pale of true religion, is trusting, obedient, and humble. The thrust of his whole being carries him toward Jesus. He knows that Jews consider the Gentiles "unclean" and therefore Jesus should not enter his house. Nevertheless he has no doubt that Jesus can and will cure his sick servant. He has authority and understands the power of command. He believes that Jesus can heal by his word alone.

Would Jesus be astonished by the smugness of our unbelief or the daring of our faith?