

Readings: Amos 7:12 – 15; Psalm 84 (85): 8 – 13; Ephesians 1: 3 – 14; Mark 6: 7 – 13.

Today we begin a series of eight readings from the Letter to the Ephesians, traditionally ascribed to Saint Paul, but believed by some scholars to have been written by a later follower, perhaps using some original words of Saint Paul. Although a final decision one way or the other is unlikely, it should be stressed that, since the late third century, the Church has included the letter in the *Canon* (list) of New Testament books and therefore its teaching has authority for Christians.

The epistle is unusual among those attributed to Paul by following the initial greeting, not with a prayer of thanksgiving for the faith of the receiving Church, but with an extended act of praise (a doxology) for the acts of God. This doxology forms today's reading.

Unlike many of the epistles, which deal with the particular issues facing the Church or the individual to whom it is addressed, this doxology ranges over the whole of Christian faith. It covers everything from *the hidden plan...made in Christ from the beginning* (verse 9) – that is *before the world* (cosmos – the universe) *was made* (verse 4) – right up to the point when *the times had run their course* (verse 10). It covers everything from before time and space existed until the end of history.

Within that vast range it includes: -

God the Father's choosing *us*, *before the world was made* with the intention that we should be *holy and spotless, and live through love in his presence* (verse 4):

The gracious gift of his *Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, in whom, through his blood, we gain our freedom, the forgiveness of our sins* (verse 7):

Our adoption into his family *in Christ* (verse 5):

The gift of the Holy Spirit as *the pledge of our inheritance* (verse 14):

The revelation to us – that is, first of all the Jews (verse 11), and later Gentile Christians (verse 13) – of God's hidden plan for the whole of time and space – his ultimate purpose in creating the universe and choosing us, namely bringing *everything together under Christ, as head, everything in the heavens and everything on earth* (verse 10):

Our Christian task – to live a life full of the *praise of the glory of God's grace* (verse 6).