

(B18) SUNDAY 18 OF THE YEAR

(AUGUST 1ST, 2021)

Readings: *Exodus 16:2 – 4, 12 – 15; Ps. 77(78):3,4,23 – 25,54; Ephesians 4:17 – 24; John 6: 24 – 35.*

In today's reading from Ephesians the writer moves on from teaching about the unity demanded of Christians and the gifts the ascended Lord has given to the Church to achieve that unity both in this life and in the life to come.

He turns to the qualities of life which the Christian must renounce and begins with a description of the pagan way of life which his readers / hearers abandoned when they became believers in Christ. He describes their former way of life as *aimless* and – in verses omitted from today's reading – explains what he means. The pagans' understanding is darkened, so that they know nothing of divine truth, and this leads them into *depravity* – all kinds of unlawful sexual activity. One commentator suggests that the writer included this passage, not because his hearers were still guilty of this conduct, but because he knew they had rejected it.

This enables him to contrast what they had rejected with the new life – of which, with some irony, he writes *that is hardly the way you have learnt from Christ, unless you failed to hear him properly.* He seems to be saying that, although they have rejected sinful behaviour which concerns their bodies, they haven't grasped the deeper truth that their whole mental outlook needs to be changed: *Your mind must be renewed by a spiritual revolution.* If it isn't the danger remains that the *old self* will reassert itself and be *corrupted by following illusory desires.* Only a fundamental change will enable them to live the life of *goodness and holiness* for which God created them. In the verses which follow today's reading (24 – 29) there is a list of things which need to be changed: - lying must be replaced by telling the truth, angry resentment with reconciliation, stealing with honest work, evil talk with speech which is edifying and brings grace to those who hear it – this last teaching seems to apply particularly to conversation between church members. Sometimes it may seem that the message of a biblical writer like the author of Ephesians speaks of a once-for-all turning away from a former way of life to the new life in Christ. But experience shows us that the need for conversion will last for the whole of our lives. We shall repeatedly need to follow the author's advice to *put aside your old self, which gets corrupted by following illusory desires* – all the pointless dreams which come between us and Jesus.