

(B19) SUNDAY 19 OF THE YEAR

(AUGUST 8TH, 2021)

Readings: *1 Kings 19:4 – 8; Ps. 33 (34): 1 – 8; Ephesians 4: 30 – 5: 2; John 6: 41 – 51.*

Today's reading from the letter to the Ephesians continues the instruction on the way a Christian community should live, which began with verses 25 – 30. Today's teaching begins with a reminder that behaviour between Christians is not just a matter of getting things right between one human being and another – it concerns our relationship with God. *Do not grieve of the Holy Spirit of God who has marked you with his seal.* Marking something with a seal was – and still is – a sign of ownership. In the Apocalypse of John (7: 3 & 4) this image is used of those who are sealed *with the seal of the living God* as a sign that they are predestined to be saved. In this letter too the *seal* indicates that those who have received it are destined for salvation.

Although we cannot be certain that the writer is alluding to the sacrament of baptism, or to a specific part of the baptismal liturgy, we may well understand it in this way. Some of the Apostolic Fathers, writing not long after this letter, certainly understood the “seal of the Holy Spirit” to be conferred by baptism. In our present-day rites candidates for Baptism and Confirmation are anointed with Chrism, and at Confirmation each candidate is addressed with the words *Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.*

The writer of this letter bases his instruction on the bond between each believer and all who have been *marked with the seal.* This rules out certain kinds of behaviour: *Never have grudges against others, or lose your temper, or raise your voice to anybody, or call each other names, or allow any sort of spitefulness.* Instead, Christians are to *be friends with one another, and kind, forgiving each other as readily as God forgave you in Christ.*

We should note that in this instruction belief in God as Trinity is already present – long before the Church had reached a formal doctrine of Three Persons in One God. We have already heard in verse 30 of the work of the Holy Spirit. Verse 32 speaks of the forgiveness given by God the Father. In the last verse of today's reading we are reminded of the example of Jesus, the Son of God, who gave *himself up in our place as a fragrant offering and a sacrifice to God.*

In every mass we make the memorial of this sacrifice, and by receiving the sacramental body of Christ we commit ourselves to follow his example of love.