

**Readings:** *Jeremiah 31: 31 – 34; Ps. 50 (51): 1,2,10 – 13; Hebrews 5: 7 – 9; John 12: 20 – 33.*

Today's Old Testament reading differs from those on the first four Sundays of Lent. Each of them dealt with a past event – the making of a covenant relationship between God and an individual or group – Noah and the whole earth, Abraham and his descendants, Moses and the people of Israel, David and Jerusalem. Today's reading speaks not of a past, but of a future covenant.

The prophet Jeremiah lived in the seventh century BC, and witnessed the defeat of the kingdom of Judah, the siege and capture of Jerusalem, the theft of the temple fittings, and the exile to Babylon of many of the people. He himself was taken to Egypt where he died (*see 2 Kings 24*).

His prophetic oracles are of two kinds – oracles of judgement on the sins of the kings and people of Judah, and oracles of encouragement, promising that after punishment God would forgive the people and care for them. Today's reading come from the chapters which scholars call 'The Book of Consolation.'

Jeremiah prophesies that the LORD will establish a new relationship with the people of Israel, and that it will differ from the earlier covenant made through Moses. In the verses which come before today's reading Jeremiah has rejected the older idea that the guilt of one member of the community would bring punishment to all its members. In future *each is to die for his own sin*. Under the new covenant, he says, each person will have a direct relationship with God. *Deep within them (God says) I will plant my Law, writing it on their hearts* – not, that is, on tablets of stone, as under the former covenant. The result will be that *they will all know me, the least no less than the greatest*. Knowing God does not mean knowing about God: it means having a personal relationship with him.

Christians see this promise fulfilled in Jesus who, as he passed the cup of wine to the apostles at the Last Supper, spoke of *the new covenant in my blood*. The next day, by his death on the cross, he made good this sign of the new relationship between his Father and those who had faith in him. Each time we join in the celebration of the mass we make the memorial of this new covenant.

We may ask ourselves: How much does joining in the mass mean to me? Do I join in celebrating it as often as I could? Do I see each mass as the renewal of my personal relationship with God?