

**Readings for Today:** *Jeremiah 20: 10 – 13; Ps 69(68); Romans 5: 12 – 15; Matthew 10:26 – 33.*

Today we plunge into the middle of Paul's letter to the Romans, which will provide the second reading on most Sundays until the middle of September. There's no doubt that the letter to the Romans is one of the most profound – and, therefore, one of the most difficult – of the New Testament writings. So a few thoughts on the letter may be helpful as we set out to read it.

In today's reading Paul makes use of the figure of Adam to explain what God needed to achieve in Christ. We cannot know how far Paul thought of Adam as a single historical – the physical ancestor of every individual human being.

What we do know is that the story of a representative human being, standing for the whole human race, is found in scripture, as well as in other religious texts. In Genesis this representative human being is called 'Adam' – which simply means 'a human being' and is related to the Hebrew word for 'soil', just as our word human is related to 'humus', which also means soil.

This kind of story is called a *myth* – a technical term, not simply a way of describing a legend or a fairy-tale. It was usually related to religious ceremonies, performed in the hope of establishing a right relationship with God. This myth speaks of a man who sinned or failed in some way, and needed to be rescued by a saviour – another man, who would come from heaven to put right what the first man had made wrong.

What is important about Paul's teaching is that he is convinced that the myth has been realized in time and space – in the human being Jesus. And this conviction is, of course, at the heart of our Christian faith. We – like Paul – believe that, at a particular time and in a particular place, one of us human beings was born, died and rose again; and in doing so he actually achieved what was described in the *myth*. He restored the proper relationship between us and God.

That is why Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians (15: 45), calls Jesus 'The Last Adam' – not, we must note, the Second Adam (as if there might be a third or fourth), but the Last, the final, the ultimate human – the one who has done for us what we could not do for ourselves, but for which the whole human race has longed.

We shall see this idea worked out, over and over again, as we read Paul's letter to the Romans.