

John 4: 2-4): *“By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of antichrist ...”*. In similar vein St John’s second letter (2:7) re-emphasises the point: *“For many deceivers have gone out into the world, men who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh; such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.”*

Nevertheless, the Docetic sect continued for some time and was vigorously condemned by the early Christian fathers, among them St Ignatius of Antioch who died early in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and St Polycarp (Ad 69-155). Paragraph 464 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church encapsulates the truth: *“The unique and altogether singular event of the Incarnation of the Son of God does not mean that Jesus Christ is part God and part man, nor does it imply that he is the result of a confused mixture of the divine and the human. He became truly man while remaining truly God. Jesus Christ is true God and true man. During the first centuries, the Church had to defend and clarify this truth of faith against the heresies that falsified it.”* **-Stephen S.**

**Entrance antiphon: Let my prayer come into your presence. Incline your ear to my cry for help, O Lord.**

**First Reading: Wisdom 6:12-16**

**Responsorial Psalm: 62: For you my soul is thirsting, O God, my God /R**

**Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18**

**Gospel Acclamation: Alleluia, alleluia! Stay awake and stand ready, because you do not know the hour when the Son of Man is coming. Alleluia!**

**Gospel: Matthew: 25: 1-13**

**Memorial Acclamation: Save us, Saviour of the world, for by your Cross and Resurrection you have set us free.**

**Communion Antiphon: The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want. Fresh and green are the pastures where he gives me repose, near restful waters he leads me.**



## Thirty Second Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle A, 2023

### Weekly Reflection: Heresies 2:

**Docetism:** Docetism is an early heresy whose tenets are condemned in the New Testament. ‘Dokesis’ means

‘appearance’ or ‘semblance’. At the core of Docetism was the theory that in reality Jesus, being God, was not born and did not become man to live, suffer and die. The physical life of Jesus was said to be an illusion. Docetists did not accept in any literal sense the essence of Christianity that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. They held that Jesus, being God, could not be human as well, since God lacked a physical body. They therefore accepted Jesus’ divinity but not his true humanity. For them, Jesus did not suffer on the Cross, either because someone else was substituted for him or because the entire crucifixion was a visual deception; nor were His resurrection and Ascension to be believed. This inability to accept that God would have allowed Jesus to die on the cross is also found in Islam, though there is no evidence that Docetism directly influenced the Islamic teaching. Muslims believe that Jesus was a prophet, born of the virgin Mary, through Whom God worked miracles. As regards the crucifixion the Quran says (4:157-158): *“ “[They] said, ‘We have killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the Messenger of God.’ They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, though it was made to appear like that to them; ...they certainly did not kill him – God raised him up to Himself. God is Almighty and Wise”*

The superficial attraction of Docetism in early Christianity is perhaps understandable because of the difficulty of accepting the unique and innovative concept of the full dual nature of Jesus and all that it entailed, including the three persons in one God. Contrary to the later Arian heresy (see next week) the Docetists’ answer was to accept His Godhead and deny His true humanity. For them the one God was spirit only. Many early gentile Christians came from a Greek-influenced background where Greek philosophy tended to disdain the body in favour of the spirit. Some Biblical texts can be seen as specifically confronting the Docetic heresy. In St John’s first letter he writes (1