

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

The Promise, Not the Law First Week of Advent Monday, December 2, 2013
8:15 AM Is 2:1-5; **Mt 8:5-11** (Originally the idea of Torah was not law at all, but instruction.)

There were many blessings associated with the Torah, the study of the instruction that Moses received on the mountain. In time, however, various developments took place all well intended that led to unintended consequences, which is the way it is in human life.

So starting with the **Book of Deuteronomy** we have a new emphasis which is more exclusive; I dare not say legalistic, but surely **all about Law**. It's not by chance that the name of the book itself in Greek is Deuteronomy, the "second law," whereas **originally the idea of Torah was not law at all, but instruction**. So the movement is already early on and it has lots of results. One of them is a sort of **exclusivity: those who know the Law can be in God's favor**; those who do not know the Law cannot be in God's favor. And that became a sort of idea in the air at the time of Jesus.

Here Jesus is confronting with something that contradicts that. Here is a **centurion**, a Roman soldier, and he comes to Jesus for help. And Jesus says I will do this. And he says, well, don't even bother coming. "Just say the word." He believes in Jesus' word. Now in a way that's expressing Christian faith. **Jesus' word he is already acknowledging has power from God**. And Jesus says well, "I haven't seen that kind of faith in all of Israel." They are all listening to the rabbis, who do teach and they do have the chair of Moses and you should listen to them, but no one is listening to me but this man, this centurion. This becomes a teaching moment when Jesus said: **"I say to you, many will come from the east and the west, and will recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."**

Now there's a very great point here. St. Paul will make a big deal about this later on when he says, well, Moses brought the Law, but the promise really came from before Moses. **Abraham is the heir to the promise**. And Jesus is already making that kind of distinction: "reclining with Abraham," not Moses; **the promise, not the Law; inclusion, not exclusion; everybody, not just somebody**. We need to keep it in mind.