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11 FRIDAY

St Clare

Friday , Week 18 of Year

Nahum 2: 1,3; 3: 1 –3, 6-7  
(Ps) Deuter 32: 35-36, 39,41  
Matt 16: 24 – 28

Today's first scripture is a unique reading from one of the minor prophets, Nahum. His short book is a prophecy and vision of the destruction of the city of Nineveh, the great rival and arch-enemy of Judah. There are powerful, poetic, evocative images in these lines describing Nineveh's destruction, but they are also full of the narrow nationalism of Judah and its hatred for the traditional enemy, Assyria. There's no suggestion of the gospel message, of peace or salvation, though there are the national hopes that the fall of Assyria arouses. There is also an underlying ideal of justice, in that Nineveh's fall is a judgement of God against those who oppose Him and oppress His people. But Nahum never said anything about the faults and failings of Judah. Ironically, just after the destruction of Nineveh, Jerusalem fell too. The vision and message of later prophecy then became wider and deeper, looking to a more universal and spiritual salvation.

There's violent language and strong sentiment in this little book, but it is the word of God. Its passionate expressions may make us a little uncomfortable, because we like to be 'reasonable' and moderate in our spiritual expressions. But maybe we need to be roused to realise that God's word is not meant to be comfortable (comforting, yes: but that's a different matter). It should arouse passion and passionate response, a zeal for God and His justice. Unlike Nahum, we have to acknowledge our own sins and weakness. But may we never presume to judge on God's behalf, and may our enthusiasm for His justice always be tempered with that love of God that Jesus taught us.