

BIBLE STUDY
February 3, 2020

THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Isaiah 58: 7-10
Matthew 5: 13-16
1 Corinthians 2: 1-5

1. Isaiah 58: 7-10

- Chapters 56-66 comprise the Third Isaiah: (The Second Isaiah--Chapters 40-55--express the hopes of the community for return home while they are still in the Babylonian exile. Chapters 56-66 speaks the struggles and the hoped for blessings of the community that has returned home.
- In Chapter 58, the prophet is commanded by God to tell the people that there observance of religion must be more than superficial. It must be backed up by conversion and change. True religion will show itself in care for others. It will be put into action.
- Vv. 1-6: God says that the people cry out to him and ask to know his ways. Their desire is to draw near to God. The people complain that they fast and God does not seem to see or take notice. God responds that they do indeed fast but the fast is also for show. It is superficial. They care about their own business. They keep on quarreling and fighting. A real fast is to humble oneself before God.
- V. 6: God wants a fast from injustice and oppression. A real fast frees others from the burden imposed on them by others.
- V 7: The fasting that God wants: sharing your bread with the hungry; bringing the afflicted and the homeless into your own house; clothing the naked when you see them—i.e. right away to relieve their need;
- V 8: If the people fast in this way, then their light will shine like the dawn and their wounds will be healed. Your actions will prove you to be righteous and God will protect your back.
- V 9: If you fast in this way, the Lord will answer your prayer and reveal his presence. If the people change their ways by lifting the burdens of others, stop accusing and speaking ill of others
- V 10: Feed the hungry and care for the afflicted, then your light will shine and gloom will be dispersed.

2. Matthew 5: 13-16

- Our reading of Matthew's Gospel was interrupted by last Sunday's feast of the Presentation of the Lord. The Gospel for the Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time is the Beatitudes, Matthew 5: 3-12. In our reading of Matthew's Gospel we have begun to read the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5-7 is Jesus' presentation of what it means to be his disciple. For a disciple everything is governed by the expectation of the Kingdom of God, which is how the world will be when God is fully in charge. Disciples live now in the reality of that Kingdom. Their present actions are directed by the future hope of God's rule.

- In the Beatitudes, Jesus invites his disciples to throw their lot in with the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the clean of heart, the peacemakers, and the persecuted so that they can also share in the reward that they will receive in the Kingdom of God.
- A disciple forgoes present comfort and satisfaction, and identifies with the vulnerable and the needy so as to be comforted and satisfied in the future coming of the Kingdom of God.
- To live in this way is an act of faith and trust in God who is faithful and true to his Word.
- V. 13: Those who live in this unassuming and vulnerable way and choose solidarity with those who struggle and suffer are the ones who can save the world. They can be "salt" and "light" for the world. Just as Isaiah says that those who care for the needy and afflicted—their light will shine—they will be light for the world.
- V. 13b: Being salt and light comes with responsibility. Salt is very valuable for seasoning and preservation. Salt that goes bad is useless and only good to be thrown onto the road and trampled upon. A Christian, who loses his /her fervor and fidelity, is of no use to the world. Their calling as a disciple is wasted.
- V. 14: A city set on a hill: The Jerusalem temple was on a hill and when lit by torches at night was seen by all and was a beacon—the light of the world. It would be a waste to light a light and not let it be seen.
- V. 15: It would be a waste of fuel to light a lamp and cover it. You want the light to illumine the entire area.
- V. 16: In the same way, our light—our God given talents and gifts—must be used and visible and shine before men and women. Our witness in the world gives glory to God.

3. 1 Corinthians 2: 1-5

- The Church at Corinth was split by divisions. Some members of the community felt that they were better—smarter, more sophisticated, more spiritually advanced—than other members of the community. The elite of the community prided themselves on having higher spiritual gifts than others. Paul will teach them throughout this letter that no one is better than anyone else. The stronger in the community should be desirous of serving the weaker members. Paul's crowning argument is that love is the greatest of all the spiritual gifts. Love builds up; it does not tear down. Love is patient, kind, humble and self-sacrificing. Love for each other is the necessary ingredient for unity in the church and the glue that holds the community together.
- As an example to the Corinthians, Paul reminds them that Christ died on the cross to save the world. He became weak. God's strength was seen in the weakness that Jesus assumed for our sake. This is the mysterious way of God. He uses weakness to reveal his strength. This is the wisdom of God that confuses human wisdom.

- V. 1: Paul came among the Corinthians in weakness and humility, not in the sublimity of words or of wisdom. Paul often says that we need to work out our salvation "in fear and trembling." (Phil. 2: 12) It is a reverential fear of God, respecting and reverencing his ways. There were also accusations by the Corinthians (2 Cor 10: 1) that Paul was much more forceful and authoritative in his letters than he was in person. We may read between the lines and think that Paul was not very impressive in person and maybe not a great speaker. Therefore, his physical appearance and manner was that of weakness.
- V. 2: Paul says that he was modeling himself on Christ Crucified.
- V. 3-4: He came in weakness and his message was not flashy and clever
- V. 5: Therefore, their faith does not rest on him, or human wisdom, or show, but on the power and wisdom of God.