

Bible Study

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, cycle A

Opening Prayer: (Sign of the Cross) “Lord our God, we praise you for being a loving God. You called us into relationship with you from the moment of conception and, when we responded, you made us your adopted sons and daughters through Baptism. May the words we read and our reflecting on them make us better witnesses to the love you shower on us and wish to shower on every person. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Focusing Question

1. Share a recent experience of someone performing an act of charity for you that touched your heart.
2. Do you know someone who rarely, if ever, goes to church, but seems to be a very Christian person?

Commentary before the First Reading: Isaiah 58:7-10

Prophets do not predict the future, unless we consider “If you don’t shape up, God will punish you” as foretelling the future. Prophets speak God’s message, telling people how God wants them to behave or what God wants them to look forward to. At times they also interpret the past in order to explain difficult situations in which the people find themselves. In the verses before this reading, the people had asked why God did not hear their prayers and the prophet gave God’s explicit answer. Then he gives these examples of the kind of spiritual discipline which pleases God and gets a positive response to one’s prayers.

Read the First Reading aloud. Your translation of verse 7 may start in the middle of a sentence.

1. Most of the instructions in this reading are stated in a positive manner. How would you reword the last nine words of verse 7 so that they are also stated in a positive way?
2. What do you see as the connection between prayer and doing the things outlined in verses 7 and 9?
3. In 1 Peter 4:8 we read: “Love covers a multitude of sins.” Where do you see that same teaching in this reading?
4. Notice the use of the word “light.” What might “light” refer to in this reading? Several answers are possible.

Commentary before the Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

As we continue our series of readings from Saint Paul’s first letter to the young Church at Corinth, we encounter again his frequent theme of the wisdom and power of God. There were many itinerant, non-Christian preachers in Greece at the time, who tried to win followers by impressing them with great knowledge and flawless logic. Although the mystery of faith that Saint Paul proclaimed seemed “too good to be true,” he allowed its simple starkness to speak louder than any academic logic ever could.

Read the Second Reading aloud.

1. Do you see hints here of the failure that Saint Paul had recently experienced in Athens where he had tried to compete with pagan philosophers there? What does he mean by “resolved to *know* nothing”?
2. Saint Paul was a brilliant preacher, in reality. What makes this reading an example of Saint Paul’s true humility rather than an example of a clever lie?
3. In your own words, what is the power of seeing the crucified image of Christ? Why is it so difficult for some to accept the crucifix as a sign of salvation?
4. How is faith that is based on human wisdom different from faith based on the awesomeness of God?
5. If it is the wisdom of God and the power of Christ crucified that saves, what difference does it make whether or not one does the things called for in the First Reading?

Commentary before the Gospel Reading: Matthew 5:13-16

The 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time began a series of Gospel readings from the Sermon on the Mount. We continue reading today. Jesus was a “small town boy,” and frequently used examples of everyday life among the common people to make his points. Here Jesus uses 2 of the most common elements of Jewish family life, salt and light, to teach about the life that is expected of his disciples.

Read the Gospel Reading aloud.

1. Can salt not give flavor? Can a flame not illumine whatever is around it? Explain the parallel between that and the life of a follower of Jesus Christ.

2. Ancient time did not use salt just to enhance the flavor of food; it was their primary preservative for food. What does that add to your thoughts about the life of a good disciple?
3. If the only light you give out is a dim light, or if the only flavor you add to life is bitter, are you still light and salt? What does that tell us about discipleship?
4. Although it is not one of the recommended Gospel readings for a marriage service, in what sense might this be an appropriate Gospel reading for a wedding?

Applying the Readings to our Daily Lives

1. Give examples of actions or choices – your own or those of others – that give light and flavor to life around us.
2. What can be done if one's life no longer is salt and light to the world around him/her? Do we become useless in that case??
3. What does it mean to be in a "right relationship" with someone?
4. Is it possible to be in right relationship with God while not being in right relationship with some of our brothers and sisters in this world?
5. How does the cross of Jesus help us to be in right relationships?
6. These readings beg the question: Can a person be a good Christian without going to church or without being part of a faith community? How would you answer?
7. Is there a connection between faithfully worshipping God as part of a faith community and being salt and light day in and day out?
8. What would you like to do this week in order to improve your relationship with God or with one other person?

Closing Prayer

"Almighty God and Father, you have created us to become holy so that we might be with you one day in heaven. Give us the grace to live in such a way that our every action shines with the light of your presence. Help our love for you to grow deeper every day, so that we might be ready to shine in your presence when you call us forth from this life. Grant this through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen." (Sign of the Cross)