

THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – A

The thought that the Church wishes to put before us on this fifth Sunday is that disciples of Christ should be 'the light of the world,' so we read as we continue with Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. Disciples are also spoken of as 'the salt of the earth' and that 'your light must shine in the sight of men so that seeing your good works they may give the praise to your Father in heaven.' In the first reading Isaiah speaks about sharing bread with the hungry, clothing the naked and 'then your light will shine like the dawn...your light will rise in the darkness.' In the second reading we continue with the letter to the Christians in Corinth a centre of philosophy and learning but Paul distances himself from such knowledge, he came 'not with any show of show of oratory or philosophy, but simply to tell you what God had guaranteed.'

The **First Reading** comes from the third part of Isaiah. The work, Isaiah 56-66, is a composite collection, its various parts dating from before the end of the Exile, 538 BC, to the rebuilding of the Temple in 520 BC. Taken as a whole this last part of the book of Isaiah seems to be the work of Second Isaiah's disciples composed sometime after the return from exile. It can be considered the final product of the Isaian tradition, active from the days of the great eighth century prophet himself.

The reading, 58.7-10 is from post-exilic prophecy, in the spirit of the great prophets, insisting that inward religion must accompany outward observance of the Law, here the subject is fasting. The reading gives examples of outward observances; sharing with the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, doing away with the yoke, the clenched fist, malicious words all of which manifest inward belief which itself becomes clear to all and such a person is never very far from God whose light shines forth in their everyday life. These words are very close to Jesus' teaching.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 111.4-9 is a psalm in praise of the upright man. It is clearly a reflection on the first reading for the good and just man 'is a light in the darkness' he is steadfast in his resolve and does not fear adversity and thus 'his head will be raised in glory.'

The **Second Reading** is from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Paul evangelised the church at Corinth between A.D. 50 and 52. His policy was to establish the Christian faith in a centre of population, and here he chose the great and populous port of Corinth, so that the faith could spread to the whole of the province of Achaia. The Christian community grew strong composed mainly of poor people, but Corinth was a centre of Greek life, philosophy and religions. It was also a notorious centre of immorality which was to cause problems for the newly converted. In 1Corinthians Paul addresses urgent problems that faced the church there and the decisions that had to be made to address these problems such as moral conduct, of marriage and virginity, of liturgical and Eucharistic meetings, of charisms, of matters concerning the Church and the world, appeals to civil courts, eating foods sacrificed to idols. Paul's religious genius enabled him to use all these problems as a vehicle to expound the profound doctrines of Christian liberty, the sanctification of the body, the supremacy of love, union with Christ. Paul teaches the Corinthians that there is only one master, Christ, and only one message, the cross and there is only one true wisdom.

The reading, 2.1-5, follows on immediately from last Sunday's (i.e. the 4th Sunday's) second reading in which Paul taught that God chose the weak, the nobody's of this world 'to reduce to nothing all those who count for something.' Now Paul goes on to say that when he first came to Corinth it was not with 'brilliance of oratory or wise argument,' no Paul came only with the knowledge of Christ crucified; he came 'in weakness, in fear and great trembling,' not with philosophical arguments 'but to demonstrate the convincing power of the Spirit' so that their faith would be grounded in the power of God. We see here Paul's utter reliance on the power of God which enabled him to preach the word so boldly.