

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Is 58:7-10; Ps 112; 1 Cor 2:1-5; Mt 5:13-16
Commentary by Emilio G. Chávez

This Sunday's readings can be seen as a pre-Lenten call to conversion, which is something we must all be constantly striving to do: we must always be turning to the Lord and turning away from our selfishness and sin. And all our readings today describe the blessings that flow from such changes which take place when we change in this way.

The first reading is used both by Jews on Yom Kippur (the "Day of Atonement") and by Christians during Lent. In it, the prophet Isaiah describes the true religiosity which is pleasing to God: not simply fasting and bending one's head down as signs of piety, while pursuing one's own business and even engaging in litigation (Is 58:4). The "fasting" God wants is for us to help others be free and well-fed, and that we not hide away from our fellow human beings, but help them. Then "our light" shall break forth like the dawn. Some scholars see here a "democratization" of solar language usually reserved for the king (as in Ps 72:5-6, 17). In other words, when we protect those weaker and less fortunate than ourselves, we are kings and queens, reflecting God's own radiant salvation. This is well-reflected in the psalm, which speaks of "lavish" giving to the poor. Such a generous person's love has cast out all fear (1 Jn 4:18): all our petty fears of losing a bit of our comfort, a bit of our false security, a bit of our little routine and paltry plans. Such a person sees the big picture, and it goes well beyond the small horizons of the myopically selfish life.

But this kind of life requires focus of a specific kind (we acquire what we focus on, our heart is where our treasure is): Heb 12:2-3 says that our eyes should be fixed on Jesus, the one who began and perfects our faith, who after going through his dolorous passion is now seated as king at God's right hand. This is what Paul did and preached, as he writes in our second reading. He spoke about and proclaimed only one thing: Jesus crucified, and this is what enabled the Holy Spirit and his powerful manifestations to come upon the uppity Corinthians.

In the portion of the Sermon on the Mount which is our gospel today, Jesus puts all this into graphic language: if we are insipid, lukewarm, without taste or attractiveness, if little or nothing of our life causes admiration or the giving of glory to God or

sanctification of His Name, then we are worthless as Christians, we go through the same empty motions Isaiah has just told us are not pleasing to God, or rewarded by Him.