



Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time
† Sunday 5th February 2017

In England and Wales
Cycle of Prayer – The Unemployed
Keynote: Christ the light of humanity

Prophet Isaiah 58: 7-10

The ritual of fasting was a frequent method of showing religious observance in ancient Israel. It was also commonplace to fast in time of bereavement or of national disaster – and no doubt, to be seen by your neighbours to do so! The prophet points out that to undertake such a fast, while neglecting the poor, perverts true religion. *'Thus says the Lord,'* the prophet announces, *'share your bread with the hungry and shelter the homeless poor, clothe the one you see to be naked and turn not from your own kin. Then will your light shine like the dawn.'* The priority for Isaiah is this true religion, that is the conversion of the inner heart, only then says the prophet, *'Your integrity will go before you and the glory of the Lord behind you... if you give your bread to the hungry, and relief to the oppressed, your light will rise in the darkness.'* Not altogether a bad objective for us as we enter the season of Lenten observance.

Responsorial Psalm 111 (112) – the blessings of salvation

First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians 2: 1-5

In contrast, to the many itinerant philosophers of his day, who made use of great eloquence or rational argument to spellbind the simple unlettered folk and make a comfortable living thereby, the apostle Paul speaks simply, – giving the message entrusted to him by God. *'As for me brothers,'* says Paul *'when I came to you, it was not with any show of oratory, or philosophy, but simply to tell you what God had guaranteed.'* Reminding the Christians of Corinth that he had come among them in *'great fear and trembling'*, Paul says, *'in my speeches and the sermons that I gave... only a demonstration of the power of the Spirit... I did this so that your faith should not depend on human philosophy but on the power of God.'* As witnesses of faith today, we too may be in fear and trembling at times but at our elbow as it were, we have the guarantee of the power of God's Spirit.

Gospel according to Matthew 5: 13-16

Salt was for the ancients both a valuable spice and an essential preservative. Strictly salt will not lose its flavour, but for Jews it might become ritually unclean and need to be thrown away. When Jesus said to his disciples, *'You are the salt of the earth... you are the light of the world,'* he is using two of the strongest metaphors of his time. For both sunshine and salt were precious, and signs too of God's favour. Using the example of a lighted lamp in the house, which everyone shares, Jesus tells his disciples, and us if we are listening, *'You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill-top cannot be hidden... in the same way your light must shine in the sight of all, so that, seeing your good works, they may give praise to your Father in heaven.'*