

## SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR SUNDAY

February 5, 2023

Fifth Sunday in Epiphany

**FIRST READING: Isaiah 58:1-9a** (The Message translation, alt.)

*Shortly after the return of Israel from exile in Babylon, the people were troubled by the ineffectiveness of their fasts. God reminds them that outward observance is no substitute for genuine fasting that results in acts of justice, such as feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, and clothing the naked.*

"Shout! Shout loudly; don't hold back  
Hold nothing back. Raise your voice like a trumpet!  
Tell my people what's wrong with their lives,  
face my family Jacob with their sins!  
They're busy at worship,  
and love studying all about me.  
To all appearances they're a nation of right-living people—  
law-abiding, God-honoring.  
They ask me, 'What's the right thing to do?'  
and love having me on their side.  
But they also complain,  
'Why do we fast and you, God, don't look our way?  
Why do we humble ourselves and you don't even notice?'

"Well, here's why:  
"The bottom line on your 'fast days' you do whatever you want.  
You drive your employees much too hard.  
You fast, but at the same time you bicker and fight.  
You fast, but you swing a mean fist.  
The kind of fasting you do  
won't get your prayers off the ground.  
Do you think this is the kind of fast day I'm after:  
a day to show off humility?  
To put on a pious long face  
and parade around solemnly in black?  
Do you call that fasting,  
a fast day that I, God, would like?

"This is the kind of fast day I'm after, says the Lord:  
to break the chains of injustice,  
get rid of exploitation in the workplace,

free the oppressed,  
cancel debts.

What I'm interested in seeing you do is:  
sharing your food with the hungry,  
inviting the homeless poor into your homes,  
putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad,  
being available to your own families.  
Do this and your light will shine like the dawn,,  
and your lives will turn around at once.  
Your righteousness will pave your way.  
The God of glory will secure your passage.  
Then when you pray, God will answer.  
You'll call out for help and God will say, 'Here I am.'

**PSALM 112:1-9** (Common English Bible)

Praise the Lord!

Those who honor the Lord,  
who adore God's commandments, are truly happy!

<sup>2</sup> Their descendants will be strong throughout the land.  
The offspring of those who do right will be blessed;

<sup>3</sup> wealth and riches will be in their houses.  
Their righteousness stands forever.

<sup>4</sup> They shine in the dark for others who do right.  
They are merciful, compassionate, and righteous.

<sup>5</sup> Those who lend generously are good people—  
as are those who conduct their affairs with justice.

<sup>6</sup> Yes, these sorts of people will never be shaken;  
the righteous will be remembered forever!

<sup>7</sup> They won't be frightened at bad news.  
Their hearts are steady, trusting in the Lord.

<sup>8</sup> Their hearts are firm; they aren't afraid.  
In the end, they will witness their enemies' defeat.

<sup>9</sup> They give freely to those in need.  
Their righteousness stands forever.  
Their strength increases gloriously.

## **GOSPEL: Matthew 5:13-20**

[Jesus said:] 13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

14 "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden.

15 No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. 19 Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."