

# Reflections

Homily for February 6, 2005  
Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time - A Cycle

By Father Charles Bowes

Isaiah 58:7-10  
Psalm 112:4-9  
1 Corinthians 2:1-5  
Matthew 5:13-16

*God makes possible all the good works  
in the world.*

"Share your bread with the hungry, shelter the oppressed and the homeless, clothe the naked when you see them, and do not turn your back on your own. Then your light shall break forth like the dawn..."

writes Isaiah the prophet in chapter 58. And Jesus, in Matthew chapter 5, says, "You are the light of the world...just so your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father."

I can't help but imagine - this being Scout Sunday - that the founder of the Scouting movement, Robert Baden-Powell, had to have been influenced by such teachings as these of Isaiah and Jesus Christ - commending what is helpful, true, honest and brave, working these into what would become the Scout Law. I can't help but feel uplifted seeing so many young folks and their families and their leaders who actually try to live that promise to "do my duty to God and my country."

There is, of course, a danger in the "doing," as if to say, "I can make myself perfect by my own efforts." That's not true. It's not Christian. We can never earn God's love or our place in heaven. But the danger of

self-sufficiency is worth the risk if we keep in mind that the ability, the capacity, the strength to do one's duty is ever a gift, ever a power God gives and ultimately God owns and God determines. That's the lesson Jesus learned and showed on the cross - that God's will was to be the way Jesus was to employ his ability, capacity and strength. Just being here at Mass says a lot - we mark ourselves with the sign of his cross and we say "amen" to a bit of bread and wine that is the glorified Lord - glorious in his powerlessness made whole by God.

The season of Lent is almost upon us. This coming Wednesday is Ash Wednesday. It is that time in the liturgical year when we reflect on our redemption and on our need for conversion. The readings for today lay out a possible plan of action. They summon us to take a stand for God by taking a stand in support of others. That is so very compatible with Scouting. Isaiah calls us to share our bread, a work of mercy that is perhaps more beneficial than is mere fasting. We are told to shelter the oppressed and the homeless and to clothe the naked. These acts ultimately came to be referred to as the Corporal Works of Mercy: feed the hungry; give drink to the thirsty; clothe the naked; shelter the homeless; visit the imprisoned; tend the sick; bury the dead. According to Isaiah, if we do these things, "our

## *Reflections...*

light will break forth like the dawn.”

We may think that we have done all we can do to care for ourselves, and that caring for others is more than we can manage. But remember that Isaiah was speaking to a people who themselves had just returned from exile. They had to reconstruct their social and political world. They had a temple to rebuild and religious structures to put in place. It was to such a community that Isaiah delivered his challenge. In fact, he insisted that their care of others was the condition of their own restoration.

The Gospel reading does not list the works of mercy, but it does tell the people of Matthew's community, and us as well, that with the power of God we can transform the world. Like salt, our care of others will bring out the best of a world that has turned sour; like the radiance of a lamp, we can enlighten a world that is floundering in darkness. We can be a city set on a mountain for all to see, a refuge and safe haven in a world threatened by hatred and terror.

It was the great evangelist Dwight Moody who observed, "A holy life will produce the deepest impression. Lighthouses blow no horns; they only shine." I do hope Scouting continues to shine. Thanks to you and to those who follow you in this pursuit, it will.

God makes possible all the good works in the world.