

FAITH COMES BY HEARING THE WORD OF GOD 2.7.2021

Let's look at the Bible readings for the 5th Sunday after the Epiphany, Feb. 7, to prepare for on-line, drive-in, and in-person worship (10 am) with Abounding Joy.

1ST READING: Isaiah 40:21-31 Ponder new, what the Almighty can do!

²¹Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? ²²It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; ²³who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness. ²⁴Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows on them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble. ²⁵To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One. ²⁶Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by

number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might and because he is strong in power, not one is missing. ²⁷Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God"? ²⁸**Have you not known? Have you not heard?** The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. ²⁹He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. ³⁰Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; ³¹but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

A QUESTION TO PONDER RELATED TO ISAIAH, CHAPTER 40

1. "I am God and you are not" is a pretty good summary of much of the Bible. Here the Lord reminds the people of Israel not only that he is almighty, but also that he will renew them after years of captivity in Babylon. What good comes from pondering God's creative might and our own mortality?

2ND READING: 1 Corinthians 9:16-27 Spreading the good news is what it's all about!

¹⁶For if I **preach the gospel**, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not **preach the gospel!** ¹⁷For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship. ¹⁸What then is my reward? That in my **preaching** I may present **the gospel** free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in **the gospel**.

¹⁹For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. ²⁰To the Jews I became as a Jew, in

order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. ²¹To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. ²²To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. **I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.**

²³I do it all for the sake of **the gospel**, that I

may share with them in its blessings. ²⁴Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. ²⁵Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an

imperishable. ²⁶So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. ²⁷But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after **preaching** to others I myself should be disqualified.

SOME QUESTIONS TO PONDER RELATED TO I CORINTHIANS, CHAPTER 9:

1. To understand this passage, you'll need to back up a bit and also read verses 1-15 of chapter 9. It seems that some of the Christians in Corinth were criticizing Paul and Barnabas, questioning their authority and taking issue with the practice of communities supporting visiting missionaries. What is Paul's argument for not accepting support from the Corinthians, even though he knows he has a right to it?
2. How did Paul earn money to support himself? (Check out Acts 18:1-5.)
3. Paul talks about reaching out to two groups of people, those under the Law and those outside the Law. Who are these two groups?
4. In verse 22 when Paul says, "I have become all things to all people," is he being fake, or two-faced? What's his motivation for "becoming all things"?
5. Are professional preachers (pastors) the only ones called by God to preach the gospel?
6. In what ways can we discipline ourselves so as to make us more effective witnesses to Jesus? (See verses 24-27.)

THE GOSPEL: Mark 1:29-39 Jesus on the loose: preaching, healing, casting out evil

²⁹**Immediately** Jesus left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and **immediately** they told him about her. ³¹And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them. ³²That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. ³³And the whole city was gathered together at the door. ³⁴And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit

the demons to speak, because they knew him. ³⁵And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. ³⁶And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, ³⁷and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." ³⁸And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may **preach** there also, for that is why I came out." ³⁹And he went throughout all Galilee, **preaching** in their synagogues and casting out demons.

SOME QUESTIONS TO PONDER RELATED TO MARK, CHAPTER 1:

1. We are told that Jesus healed every sick person he ever encountered. What does that teach us about God's will for our healing in this life, and ultimately in the world to come?
2. Mark frequently uses the word "immediately" to stress the urgency and the radical nature of Jesus' actions in turning back the kingdom of darkness (sickness, demons, and death). How does God enlist us to join in this battle against evil in today's world?
3. Jesus, the Son of God, spent a great deal of time in conversation with his Father (prayer). What does that say about our need to pray?