

**Opening Prayer**

**Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.**

**Isaiah 64:1-9**

<sup>64:1</sup> O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence--<sup>2</sup> as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil-- to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence! <sup>3</sup> When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. <sup>4</sup> From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him. <sup>5</sup> You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways. But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself we transgressed. <sup>6</sup> We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. <sup>7</sup> There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity. <sup>8</sup> Yet, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. <sup>9</sup> Do not be exceedingly angry, O LORD, and do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people.

**Commentary**

According to Isaiah, God does not need to wait for human beings to “do the right thing” before intervening. True, the people are swept away in their sins. True, the voices calling upon God are few and far between. But as 64:8 will go on to say, human beings are but clay, while God is the potter. It is the potter who shapes, who acts upon the clay, who decides when it is time to work the lump again. We are best advised to yield our hearts and lives to the Potter’s loving hands. What gives Isaiah hope is the character of God. Pleading for God not to “be exceedingly angry,” he asks God to show mercy and compassion toward the people. Isaiah knows God will vindicate God’s honor in the sight of the nations. God will restore the people and revive their sense of justice and righteousness.

## Reflection

Have you ever cried out for God to break in and set things straight? What were the circumstances? How did you learn or grow through the experience?

### 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

<sup>1:3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, <sup>5</sup> for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind--<sup>6</sup> just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you--<sup>7</sup> so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>8</sup> He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

## Commentary

Isaiah's longing for a day in which God would "break into" everyday reality and establish God's justice was also foundational for the worldview and passion of the early church. This comes to the fore in 1 Corinthians 7-9. The spiritual gifts are all provided by God to be put into service for the sustaining of the believing community through the period of waiting for Christ to appear. The emphasis on the last day is not ornamental. Time after time Paul returns to the Day of Judgment as the time when every person's work will be known for its true value. The present time is for waiting, an active waiting that seeks out the life that will please God.

## Reflection

Are you aware of your gifts? How are you using them for the glory of God?

### Mark 13:24-37

<sup>13:24</sup> "But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, <sup>25</sup> and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. <sup>26</sup> Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. <sup>27</sup> Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. <sup>28</sup> "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. <sup>29</sup> So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. <sup>30</sup> Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. <sup>31</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. <sup>32</sup> "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup> Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. <sup>34</sup> It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home

and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. <sup>35</sup> Therefore, keep awake--for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, <sup>36</sup> or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. <sup>37</sup> And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."

### **Commentary**

This week's Gospel lection closes Mark's version of Jesus' apocalyptic discourse. Mark 13 opens with the disciples acting as tour guides, pointing out to Jesus the sights in Jerusalem, particularly the massive Temple compound constructed from huge stones, which gave the impression of permanence. Jesus told them not to be impressed with edifices, for the Temple will be utterly destroyed. He suggested that we are all in a "night" of sorts, and this parable encourages watchfulness as the night wears on—as indeed it has for two thousand millennia. We do not know we are in the night. Perhaps the first ray of dawn is about to break; perhaps it is not even midnight. All we need to know of the time, however, is that "salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers" (Romans 13:11) and to continue faithfully to carry out the work Christ has given us to do.

### **Reflection**

What things do you do that you would not want to be found doing in the end? How can focusing on Christ's return reinforce consistency in our discipleship?

### **Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19**

<sup>80:1</sup> Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,  
you who lead Joseph like a flock!  
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth

<sup>2</sup> before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh.  
Stir up your might, and come to save us!

<sup>3</sup> **Restore us, O God;  
let your face shine, that we may be saved.**

<sup>4</sup> O LORD God of hosts,  
how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?

<sup>5</sup> **You have fed them with the bread of tears,  
and given them tears to drink in full measure.**

<sup>6</sup> You make us the scorn of our neighbors;  
our enemies laugh among themselves.

**<sup>7</sup> Restore us, O God of hosts;  
let your face shine, that we may be saved.**

**<sup>80:17</sup> But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,  
the one whom you made strong for yourself.**

**<sup>18</sup> Then we will never turn back from you;  
give us life, and we will call on your name.**

**<sup>19</sup> Restore us, O LORD God of hosts;  
let your face shine, that we may be saved.**

### **Closing Prayer**

**Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.**