

Lectionary readings: Isaiah 49: 8-16; Psalm 131; 1 Corinthians 4: 1-5; Matthew 6: 24-34

For reflection and prayer:

- **Isaiah 49:** Isaiah is speaking to God's people in exile. There is a sense in which people are in exile today, far away from God, so this message is for us too. God's love for us is such that He will never forget us for we are indelibly imprinted on the palm of His hand. God, through the prophet, is calling us out of exile, calling us back to where we belong, in the heart of God. When we come back to God, we will experience inner freedom, inner peace, abundance, security, comfort, guidance, hope, great joy. This is what God is offering us. Let's open our arms wide and receive the gifts of His grace to make us whole.
- **Psalm 131:** This is a beautiful Psalm in the form of a prayer by someone who has come to experience inner peace and calm, something very much needed in our society today. Here it is in 'Psalms for Praying' for us to reflect on: *'Most gracious Presence, let me not be arrogant, nor boast of my virtuous deeds; let me not seek fame or set my heart on the riches of the world. Help me to calm and quiet my soul, like a child quieted at its mother's breast; like a child that is quieted, so be my soul. I shall hope in You, O Breath of my breath, from this time forth and for evermore.'*
- **1 Corinthians 4:** In the church at Corinth, the Christians were comparing and contrasting their leaders - Paul, Apollos, Peter. Paul reminds them and us that our church leaders are servants of Christ, seeking to

lead people deeper into God. Like the Christians at Corinth, we, too, are quick to judge our spiritual leaders and compare them with one another. Would it not be better if we were to open our hearts to God and see our ministers, priests etc through God's eyes, affirming them, encouraging them, accepting their imperfections along with our own. Paul says it matters very little to him what anyone thinks of him, or where he ranks in popular opinion. These are the words of a man who considers himself secure as God's beloved, not here to fulfil the expectations of others, but to serve God who loves him and has chosen him. Are we secure in the knowledge of God's love?

- **Matthew 6:** Here is teaching we need to heed today, for we have all been taken in by the advertisements which tell us that image is all-important. A lot of what we call faith is not faith, for too often we rely on the things we have which make us feel secure- this is a false security - and worry so often seems to characterise our lives. Jesus invites us to look at the wild flowers and see their beauty. How important it is to wonder at the beauty of the countryside and to find God there. And then to come to the awareness that God cares for us and to open ourselves to God's great generosity and give thanks. Appreciation and gratitude increase our faith. *'Steep your life in God-reality'* (v33 The Message). Let our focus be on God, not on ourselves, and we will find that inner peace that so often eludes us. Here is v34 in The Message: *'Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.'* This is an invitation to us to be present where we are, to live in the here and now and find God there.

