

Isaiah 58:1-9a (9b-12)ⁱⁱ

Thus says the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins. Yet day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God. "Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?" Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers. Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

[If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.]

ⁱⁱ **About the First Reading: Isaiah 58:1-9a (9b-12)**

In today's verses, God redefines the role of fasting. An expression of humility, fasting offers the people an opportunity to do for others what God has already done for them. God had chosen to free the captives (52:1-3), feed the hungry (55:1-2), and bring Israel's homeless back to their homeland (49:8-12).

True spiritual maturity results in a new exodus. Verse 8 is reminiscent of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. Then a pillar of cloud guided them by day and a pillar of fire guarded them by night. So it will be for those who keep the Lord's fast. The Lord will deliver them from all the exiles into which they have been driven by their own hardheartedness.

The attitude of the heart and use of the tongue must also reflect charity. The people must give more than food, clothing, or shelter: they must give themselves. Instead of seeking their own pleasure, they must first satisfy the desires of the needy, finding their own desires satisfied by God (58:11).