

Lectionary readings: Isaiah 9: 1-4; Psalm 27; 1 Corinthians 1: 10-18; Matthew 4: 12-23

For reflection and prayer

- **Isaiah 9:** The Israelites at this time were in a precarious position, threatened with exile. Isaiah speaks of hope and says that the darkness and despair will not go on for ever. None of us escapes times of darkness and trouble as we go through life. But we can be sure that the Lord will be with us whatever we have to endure. Isaiah looks forward to a time when a deliverer will come and will bring light into the darkness of the world. We believe Jesus is that Light. Whatever we are going through of pain or suffering at this moment, the light of God's presence is shining. So let this week be a time of hope in God's presence and power breaking through our darkness, anxiety, fear or despair.
- **Psalm 27:** This is a lovely Psalm that speaks of intimacy. I love v4: *'One thing I have asked of my Beloved; that I shall ever seek: that I might dwell in the Heart of Love all the days of my life, to behold the Beauty of my Beloved, and to know Love's plan.'* (Psalms for Praying) v9: *Enfold me in Your strong arms, O Blessed One.'* Whatever fears assail us, whatever doubts we are experiencing, whatever problems we are coping with, we are in the hands of a loving God who will never abandon us. Let's turn to God this week and know ourselves enfolded in His loving arms.
- **1 Corinthians 1:** The Corinthian church was no stranger to problems and divisions, and down the ages

to the present day, the church is still a flawed community. How could it be otherwise when it is made up of imperfect human beings like ourselves? But the Gospel of Jesus Christ is precisely this: that God wants to change us through His Spirit so that we reach out to one another, not with criticism and back-biting, but with love and acceptance, resulting in harmony and in our seeing one another through the eyes of Christ. So let's ask God this week to help us become the people we can become; and let's allow His Spirit to work in us so that we affirm one another, encourage one another, see Christ in one another, enabling us to move forward in love, set free from the need to find fault with others and helping one another to be set free to love as God loves each one of us.

- **Matthew 4:** Jesus' message echoed John's message: *'Turn to God. God's Kingdom is here.'* He invites us to turn from our selfishness, from our self-centredness, our pride and all the other things we are prone to, and open ourselves up to God who wants to change us. Come with me, Jesus says to us, as He said to His first disciples, and I will make new people out of you. This is what the Gospel of Jesus Christ is about - radical discipleship, radical change. We don't have to stay as we are; nor do we have to fear change, for everything God does He does in love and for our blessing and good. Let's hear Jesus' invitation to us each day this week to turn to Him - in our joys and in our sorrows - and in turning, find Him a real source of strength, hope, peace, encouragement and new life so that each day is a new beginning. *'I believe that every morning God says: Begin again your journey and your life. Your sins which are many are not only forgiven, but are the basis on which I am building blessings.'* (Thomas Merton)