

**Lectionary readings: Micah 3: 5-12; Psalm 43;
1 Thessalonians 2: 9-13; Matthew 23: 1-12**

For reflection and prayer

- **Micah 3:** So long as the cultic prophets got their fee, they weren't concerned about truth, and so they told the people what they wanted to hear. Micah, on the other hand, was a prophet filled with God's Spirit, dedicated to speak for God. The false prophets were saying, *'We've got God on our side. He'll protect us from disaster.'* We often hear people say today, 'What have I done to deserve this?' when trouble, illness or tragedy strikes. We seem to think that faith in God is an insurance policy against disaster. A friend of mine went to confession before her marriage - the first time for many years - and the priest told her she had the faith of a 12 year old! She is very grateful to that priest for his honesty; that remark spurred her on to deepen her faith. What do you think he would say to you? And how would you respond?
- **Psalm 43:** Here is this Psalm in 'Psalms Now', a modern paraphrase of the psalm for us to reflect on: *'O God, my life is cluttered with conflicts. And there are times when You seem oblivious to it all. The pitfalls before me, the weaknesses within me - all this is most depressing. I feel as if I am groping in utter darkness. Break into my darkness, O God. Set me free from my hang-ups. May the daily pressures that threaten to strangle me drive me to Your fountainhead of grace. Then night will give way to dawn, depression shall resolve into joy and I shall sing Your praises once more. O foolish spirit, why*

do you fret over so many things? God is here! He knows all about your troubles and trials. Renew your faith in Him and rejoice. I shall rejoice! No matter how dark the night, God is my ever-present and eternal hope.'

- **1Thessalonians 2:** Here is v 12 in The Message: *'With each of you we were like a father with his child, holding your hand, whispering encouragement, showing you step-by-step how to live well before God, who called us into His Kingdom, into this delightful life.'* Paul speaks here with great tenderness and love. This is a challenge to each one of us to treat people with the same gentleness and loving-kindness, getting alongside people, encouraging, helping, accompanying one another on our spiritual journey. Let's try to do that this week.
- **Matthew 23:** This is a very challenging passage; the religious leaders and Pharisees were good at teaching God's law but bad at living it out. They burdened people with rules, causing people to stumble under the weight of the laws. They themselves prayed to impress others; they loved showing off; they loved flattery and attention, putting themselves on a pedestal. God hates superficiality and hypocrisy. He wants us to let Him guide us in our everyday living, practising humility and love. v12 (The Message): *'Do you want to stand out? Then step down. Be a servant. If you puff yourself up, you'll get the wind knocked out of you. But if you're content to be yourself, your life will count for plenty.'*

Jesus said, *'Walk with me....Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.'*
(Matthew 11: 29-30 The Message)