

5th Sunday in OT - Cycle A - February 5, 2017

In last week's Gospel we heard the Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount. One commentator called the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus's Inaugural Address.

This great teaching continues to instruct us on the meaning of discipleship. With the metaphor of light and salt Jesus reveals the intimate connection between what a disciple is and what a disciple does. Jesus teaches us that what we do flows from who we are and what we are. We can enlighten the world with the message of the gospel because our lives have been transformed by that gospel.

We can serve others in various ways because we have been saved by God's grace, and now we are agents of that grace in the lives of others.

Our own renewal becomes the means through which God renews the world.

Now this may sound very grandiose, but it's not. It is the truth about the way God works.

Extraordinary things are accomplished through ordinary people.

Think about it - Jesus grew up as the son of a carpenter; many of the apostles were fisherman; Paul was a tentmaker. We are store clerks, restaurant workers, and teachers, bus drivers and doctors, bank tellers and engineers. Like St. Paul and the others, we come to Christian life in weakness and in fear and much trembling.

But again and again in these Sunday's of Ordinary Time we see how God chooses the weak to confound the strong, the insignificant people to amaze the scholars.

The call to the Christian life is a call to action. Jesus tells his disciples and you and me that we are to help flavor life and bring God's radiant love to everything we do.

It is not about playing it safe, or seeking the false security of a comfortable life. Christians are called to go forth and make disciples; that means to enliven the world with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

It is Good News, not just, interesting information. Good News must be told and retold. It must be shared because if we try to keep it inside of us we will burst.

Gloomy Christians and sad tellers of the stories of Jesus are not effective. They have gone flat. They have put their light under a bushel basket.

St Paul was the salt and light to the Gentiles because he trusted in the power of God and gave all the glory to the crucified and risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

Do we act in that same manner or are we are more like "cultural Catholics," people along for the ride as long as it doesn't get too uncomfortable.

To be salt and light is not a call to self-improvement. The way to the Father, the way to be a disciple of Jesus, is one that demands we concern ourselves with our neighbor in need. We must make Isaiah's call our own: by sharing our bread with the hungry, by sheltering the oppressed and the homeless, clothing the naked, and extending sincere love to all those we meet.

Salt only becomes useful when it is mixed up with other things. We are not just salt; we are salt of the earth. We should be mixed up with the earth, with the reality around us. We cannot just stand in front of the pot; we should be prepared to be thrown into the cooking pot of human affairs.

Light too when all by itself is useless. We are to be the light of the world! We should make things visible, we should light up possibilities, and we should brighten up those around us.

The opening lines from Isaiah echo the moral standards required by the divine king in the parable of the sheep and the goats. (Mt 25:31-46)

People who serve the Kingdom of Heaven must reach out to the less fortunate on this earth. This is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian and Catholic.

Our first reading concludes with the addition of a list of vices that we must try to remove from our society – oppression, false accusation, and malicious speech. I would say we have our work cut out for us!

Without question far too many people lack adequate housing, food, clothing, and the essentials to live lives of human dignity. One group in particular – refugees fleeing war and violence – have been very much in the news this week.

The Catholic Bishops including our own Archbishop have been critical of the President's Executive Orders on this subject. Bishop Vásquez of Austin, Texas, Chairman of the Committee on Migration for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, wrote, "We believe that now more than ever, welcoming newcomers and refugees is an act of love and hope."

(and) "While we affirm the right of sovereign nations to control their borders, we likewise affirm our moral responsibility to respect every human being's dignity. We must remember that those fleeing horrendous and unspeakable violence and grinding poverty have the right, as children of God, to provide for the basic needs of themselves and their families. Scripture reminds us repeatedly of our obligation to care for the widow, the orphan and the stranger. "

Archbishop Lori's letter is in this week's bulletin.

In 1993 when the Bishops issued a statement calling for every parish and for every Catholic to be engaged actively in the church's social ministry they titled their statement – not surprisingly - "Communities of Salt and Light".

In our bulletin this week there is information about the Catholics in Annapolis event on February 15, an opportunity to come together with other Catholics from around Maryland to advocate for

issues before the MD General Assembly. An essential part of our call as Catholics and Christians is to faithful citizens active in the public square.

Jesus challenges us to embrace the ultimate antidote to all of this darkness. He calls us to create lives of generosity, gratitude and selflessness.

When you were baptized, a candle was lit, and the priest prayed over you: “This light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly ... may you walk always as a child of the light.” God has passed the light of the heavens on to you and to me.

In our own place, in our own time, in our own way, we can make a difference.

“You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.”