

OUR LADY, STAR OF THE SEA, WEYMOUTH

HOMILY FOR THE 5th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A)

5th FEBRUARY 2017

This week's Gospel follows directly on from last week. Those beatitudes – the children called then the beautiful attitudes – were arranged as future tense promises, enclosed within the present tense. You may call it a holy sandwich with a code for living Jesus wants us to follow; encompassing the paradox of the here and whilst still not yet. And recall Jesus finished with happy are YOU when you are persecuted on account of my name. No longer a general statement, but directed at you and me, very personal.

And today the message is a direct continuation of Jesus' sermon and it seems simple enough. Look at the sanctuary, in a way our altar servers are acting as salt and lights within the church – enhancing our Mass and being very visible! But Jesus sermon is very personal and is to all of us. YOU are the salt of the earth; YOU are the light of the world.

I used to dream that one day I'd live in some kind of stately home, with beautiful grounds leading up to the house, then an impressive hallway as you enter with gorgeous, precious paintings on the wall. I'd have a wonderful cook (well, that's come true!) and invite people in to share in my good fortune. I'd have a huge famous painting hanging in pride of place. You wouldn't be able to miss it; it would be in front of you as you walk in. You see it would be a treasure; I'd want everyone to see it as I knew it would bring a smile and a light to their faces.

Then we'd share a great meal, made by my wonderful cook, and share about our lives and put the world to rights in each other's company! You were all invited by the way! Can you imagine it?

Let's say one day that cook forgets the salt, no seasoning. The food is bland and all you my guests are thinking what's so good about this cook Jonathan keeps going on about. Yet if the right amount of salt was in the food, it would become a treat and delight for everyone. The salt is an essential ingredient and a little goes a long way.

When Jesus says you are the salt of the earth and warns of it becoming tasteless, I believe he is highlighting an urgent need. We need to be salty for each other. Here in this building where we share the meal of the Last Supper, we need to stimulate those who are becoming fatigued, for whom coming to Mass has become routine. Just as you were sharing my imaginary meal with me that had the ability to both nourish and excite us if it was salted, so there are some here who need invigorating, whose faith is at risk of being stale. Look out for each other; help someone if you recognise they need it. And if you recognise in yourself that

you've become stale, have courage, be humble enough to let us pray for you. (prayer ministry after: come forward or wait quietly in your pew)

But Jesus is also referring to the urgent need for us as Christians, YOU again, to wake the world up, outside of this church to be its salt. Just as if you have an open cut on your skin and put salt on it, it would sting, similarly when we see areas where the world is wounded God's message of truth can sting. However, if we ensure that the overall meal we offer, by that I mean the message of love of Jesus, is flavoured well – i.e. a big dollop of God's love in it due to how we act and treat people, we will be that salt Jesus talks of. We will give spice, and flavour where it is needed.

Now, remember the famous painting that I want everyone to see, because it would bring a smile and a light to their faces. Well, it's great for me to invite all of you, my friends in to see it, but that seriously limits the numbers who benefit. I need to take it out of the house don't I? Similarly, we need to take our lighted faces outside. Bright faces as we leave today, and later at home or at play or at work! Jesus wants us to live out our Christianity in whatever workplace of life we are in. Some people will be in senior or prominent positions where the way they live life may touch many others – that's fabulous, although perhaps a bit daunting, if that's you, keep alert! For most, our encounters are seemingly smaller; yet it's in these close meetings with people we can often have the biggest impact – we need to remember to be a light, even if that light is just a humble candle shining and bringing a little warmth to someone.

And Jesus says these good works of ours will act as a light; and then those seeing it may give thanks to our Father in heaven – wow! People, who see us as a light, will recognise our Father in heaven!

For a long time our churches in the UK have been places of maintenance; that's good, we support each other and try to live good lives. But Pope after Pope has said time and again that the Church exists to (evangelise) tell others about God. That's its primary purpose. Why do we seem not to hear this? I'm looking around right now because some of you will now choose to stop listening! Yet you are the church, therefore you have a responsibility is to tell others what you believe, to bring a bit of Christ into their lives. (Imagine dragons and demons- I can't escape unless you show me how)

There are so many simple ways to do this without being an overt evangelist as such, but ways where we are doing as Jesus asks. Some find being part of a group helps them to do this, there is the CAP, street pastors, Eucharistic ministers, the food bank, the SVP....to name just a few. I know some of you on a more individual basis visit those in nursing or care homes, or the prison – that's fantastic.

Jesus says we are salt and light, and we are to take this outside of this building. There is prayer ministry after Mass. If you need courage, or strength, or increased belief, perhaps ask for a simple prayer for that. If you are hurting too much, do you know that simply the way you carry that hurt can be an awesome sign to others; they can't understand how you manage – that is a great light people see.

For some, Jesus is just a great teacher on how to live – if that is you then you have the choice to think about what he says although I believe you'll find last week and this week's Gospels are compelling. However, if we believe the bible is God's word, we have only one option, and that is to act on it.

If you are struggling, let people here support you and that light can shine in its own way. For the rest of us, do what you can to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked – let what you believe be seen and be a light in your own circumstances. Jesus loves you whatever, but others will experience and learn love if you act.

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