

### **Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

One of the best things about spending some holiday time with other members our families, is that it can be a time when we recall the past and share the memories of our growing up. When I was away last month, I shared with my three sisters what I had written about my father. Over a few years I had put together my memories of him and the stories that I had heard about him. I could not write about my father without also writing about my mother and my two older brothers. Looking at what I had written was a rather precious time when we could thank God for who they had been for us and how they had influenced our lives.

Our gospel today challenges us to look at the kind of influence that each of us is called to have over the people who know us: those who are close to us and then to others in our wider world. Sometimes we might feel as if we have very little influence upon others. Sometimes we feel quite powerless. But maybe we are overlooking something?

When we hear Jesus today calling us to be salt of the earth and light for the world, we should not be frightened by that. Each of us in our own way is called to be that salt and light. These images of salt and light flow immediately from the beatitudes that Jesus had just spoken about. One commentary said it very well

for me. “The suggestion is that people who are prepared to live in the vulnerable, non-grasping way pronounced “blessed” in the beatitudes are the ones who can really help lift humanity’s burdens, thereby becoming and remaining “salt of the earth and “light of the World”. The vulnerable make the world safe for humanity.”

I think that last sentence is worth pondering. “The vulnerable make the world safe for humanity” I think I felt very safe within my family because my parents were strong but never dominating. You could say that they were vulnerable people. They worked hard to care for their seven children. They knew the suffering of losing two of their sons. My mother battled with illnesses of different kinds. But my parents were there for others in their vulnerability.

I think that is the challenge of today’s gospel. As people of the beatitudes we are called to live for others not because of our strength but because of the strength and the power of God at work through us. We become salt for the earth because we have been salted by God. We have let God purify us and preserve us and give taste to our lives as salt influences the things that it is sprinkled upon. We can be all that for others. In fact we must be that for others. If our faith is bland without sharpness or passion, then others will not want to taste

it. Others will not be drawn to Jesus through us unless we live our faith with joyful commitment.

We become light for the world by allowing God's light to shine through us. Again, it is not what we do but it is our openness to God that allows his light and his power and his goodness to be at work in and through us for the sake of others. Jesus tells us that once we have been enlightened by Christ it is the most natural thing for us to be a light for others. A lamp is not lit to be put under a bed but upon a lampstand for all to see. Jesus tells us "Let your light shine so that seeing your good works they may give praise to your Father in heaven."

Our first reading today from the Prophet Isaiah is a challenging way of reflecting upon how we can let our light shine. "Share your bread with the hungry, and shelter the homeless poor, clothe the man you see to be naked and do not turn from your own kin. Then your light will shine like the dawn and your wounds be quickly healed over." That last phrase just helps us to remember that God does not forget our needs when we reach out to others. St. Francis of Assisi picked that up very beautifully in the prayer that we know well. "It is in giving that we receive, in pardoning that we are pardoned and in dying that we are born to eternal life.

We sometimes think that we need to be extraordinary people to influence others and make a difference to our world. When we stop and think about the people who have influenced us most, we may find that they were not extraordinary people but ordinary people like us who lived their lives generously for others. It is that generosity of spirit, that makes room for God to use us so that we can become salt of the earth and light for our world.