

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

The year 12 students at St. Francis de Sales College began their year with a three day retreat at Victor Harbor. I joined them for a Liturgy on Tuesday evening. Two of the people who were giving leadership during the retreat have just graduated from year twelve themselves. These two young people of faith are about to begin their tertiary studies, but they have also been employed for one day a week by the College in a kind of chaplaincy role. It was wonderful to hear them share something of the faith and their stories with the students on Tuesday night. No doubt they were able to be heard in a different way than I was.

Our gospel today challenges to look at the kind of influence that each of us is called to have over other people: 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?

To help see what influence we do have over others it might be good to think of the people who have influenced us throughout our lives. Most of us are able to look back with deep thanks for the members of our families who have shaped us into the kind of people we are now. One of the young people that I was talking

about asked me who influenced me to become a priest. I told her that I was fortunate to have known some really great priests as I was growing up, but that it was my family who influenced me most. I could somehow see that they lived their faith in love of us their children and in the service of others. Getting seven children to Mass on a Sunday was not easy. But they did it faithfully. In an age before television, it was easier for us to say the family rosary together after tea than it is today.

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 we reflected upon last week. 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 thinking about. “The vulnerable make the world safe for humanity”. I felt very safe within my family because my parents were strong but never dominating. I didn’t think of them as perfect. But that did not prevent them from loving us deeply.

You could say that they were vulnerable people. They knew the suffering of losing two of their sons. My mother battled with illnesses of different kinds.

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 put upon. We can be all that for others. Jesus reminds us though that salt can lose its ability to do all those things if it becomes contaminated. Then its only use is to be thrown on the path.

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 lovely 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 are celebrating Word of God Sunday today. It is an opportunity to thank God that his Word is proclaimed for us to give us light to find the path on which Jesus leads us. It is a moment to renew our commitment to read the Scriptures often and to be open to the treasures that they offer to us. Nourished by God's Word we can truly be salt of the earth and light for the world.