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Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time - 5 February 2023

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5 February 2023

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reflection by Joe Tedesco

Introduction

As people following Jesus Christ, we receive much blessing. We are reminded that God blesses us so we can be a blessing to others. Thus, we become a light on a hill transforming darkness with the light of Christ.

Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you are the light who rises for the upright. Lord have mercy.

You are the salt of the earth. Christ have mercy.

You are the light of the world. Lord have mercy.

Collect

The oration

Keep your family safe, O Lord, with unfailing care,
that, relying solely on the hope of heavenly grace,
they may be defended always by your protection.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever and ever.

The heart of this Sunday's collect is the petition that God, in devoted loving kindness, continually guard, protect and strengthen the community. The request is made out of the belief that the faithful are members of God's family. In this we belong to the divine household both as adopted children and as servants, implying a deep intimacy with God and a willingness to serve. The divine guardianship is an expression of God's intimate devotion to us as the head of the household, and as such carries the expectation that God will protect us.

The ancient manuscripts show the prayer was used early in the year, either in proximity to Lent or as a Lenten collect. This association highlights the helplessness

the prayer expresses in face of sin. The only sure hope is reliance on heavenly grace.

The combination of God's 'care', custodianship and protection point to the intimacy with which God relates to the faithful. Further these are associated in the prayer tradition with God's guarding, protecting, cherishing, ruling, defending and strengthening. The collect is insistent that the family of God continually need these gifts.

Acknowledgement

The discussion of the collect, slightly adapted, was composed by Gerard Moore for the Canadian liturgical journal *Celebrate!* (Novalis Press). Our thanks to them for permission to reuse the material.

First Reading

Isaiah 58:7–10

Being a people of God demands real-world service to the hungry and the afflicted. It requires peaceable attention to those in need.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 112(111):4–9 R. v. 4

A light rises in the darkness for the upright.

The Psalm speaks to the intertwined relationship between how one blesses others and a blessed life received.

Second Reading

1 Corinthians 2:1–5

Paul reminds the Corinthian community that the only teaching of worth he offers is found in a humbled and crucified Christ that is, however, the wisdom of God.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 5:13–16

The teachings on salt and light come immediately after the Beatitudes. Jesus reminds us that those ways of living the Christian life are not just for our own benefit but are to benefit the world in which we live.

Reflection

The Gospel reading from today's liturgy utilises two beautifully simple yet effectual symbols to encourage Jesus' followers to engage in the world they live in with purpose.

Starting with salt, we should begin by recognising that salt in the ancient world was a more significant commodity than it is today. As well as being used in the familiar way as we do so today to flavour food, it was also vital for preservation, used in medicine, and also in religious rituals. It was also rare and nowhere near as freely available as it is today. Today we can find boxes of high-quality salt for a few dollars. In the time of Jesus, even though some parts of the Palestine region had access to large quantities of salt, it was still a relatively precious substance. This was especially so among the more ordinary strata of society who often only had access to salt that was not fully separated from impurities and bonded to dirt and rock from which it came. Thus, though salt as a substance cannot lose its saltiness, it can become less effective and tainted by what it is bonded to, effectively losing its potency.

This would be the background of Jesus' words. We are to be salt that is useful because it is 'in the world' but is not bound to it and diluted by its impurity. This interpretation is often stated when reflecting on this reading. There is more here though. Salt is also only effective when it is infused in something else. In itself salt is not particularly useful. Its purpose is to be combined with other things.

A common occurrence in my family home when I was growing up was big family dinners with pasta, meats and a big bowl of green salad, dressed with vinegar, oil and salt. The salt was usually left until last so as to help maintain the crispness. One day, deciding to help out the preparation I dressed the salad with the usual ingredients, including the salt. I moved on as the rest of the meal continued to be prepared. Unbeknown to me, my father decided to do the same. He could see that there was oil and vinegar in the bowl but had assumed that the salt had not been added. He duly added a generous amount of salt as he often did and tossed it. A few moments later, my mother did likewise unknowing that it had already been done twice! Suffice to say, the salad was not a nice addition to the meal that it usually was. It was so heavily salted that it was near inedible. A small amount of salt is blessing to the meal taking even a simple thing like lettuce and giving it vitality of taste. However, too much, and it ruins the food with which it is combined.

I suspect that Jesus was not only talking of the purity of salt when he drew the simile, but also the quantity required. We may feel insignificant and small relative to the forces that may surround us or the grandness of the situation we may be in. But a small amount of salt, especially if pure, goes a long way and will be enough.

We are to be like salt, the small amount that infuses into what is already there giving it vitality. Our Christian calling is to go into the world, whatever that looks like to us, and help make life palatable, to be a blessing to what is already there, drawing out the best in the world around us. It is not supposed to 'take it over' and overcome the goodness that is already there. On the other hand, neither is our life of faith to be insipid and reserved. Kept in the cupboard hidden and useless.

The simile of light indicates the same thing. We are to be a light that helps the world find its way. But the light is not an end in itself. Light is purposeful because it illuminates objects so that they can be seen properly so we can successfully navigate our way. Those of us blessed with sight have all experienced that effect of looking directly into an intense light source and being blinded by it. Ironically the

source of light becomes a hinderance rather than a help. However, when the light is used to illuminate a dark situation, and we set our eyes with the aid of such light, it is most useful and, in some cases, a vital life saver. Like salt, it brings out the best of what is already there. Helping to define, understand and navigate whatever the object happens to be.

We heard last week the happiness and blessing it is to be able to hear and respond to the words of Christ. Even when it seems poorly by worldly standards, we know the gift of what it means to be living the life of the Kingdom. However, this blessed experience is not to be privatised. The world we live in, even as parts of it might reject Christ and such teaching, still needs it as much as ever. The purity of the life of Christ is always a blessing to what encounters it and we, as bearers of Christ's light, are to be just that in the world. Moreover, we can be confident that we are a blessing to our world as we contemplate and receive the life of Christ through our sacramental liturgy and through the many other ways that we encounter the living God. We pray that, as we receive the blessing of the light and love of Christ, we also find the confidence to be bearers of such light and love to the world we live in. Not by arrogant overbearing, but in small ways, often unseen ways, flavouring and illuminating the places we happen to be.



You are the salt of the earth.

Mt 5:13

Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

The Psalmist declares that a light rises in the darkness for the upright. Let us also rise up from the darkness and offer our needs to God.

Petitions

We pray for the leaders of our Church, that they may be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, and great examples in their faithfulness to God as we move towards the Synod of 2023.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the leaders of nations, that they may not be selfish in their actions but rather be selfless in the giving of their lives in service to their communities.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all students from primary and secondary schools and tertiary institutions as well as all teaching staff as they commence the new academic year. May they illuminate the life of Christ in all that they do.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray that the bread which comes from God's creation and is the work of human hands may be shared equally and fairly.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who are alone in the world, especially those without family or friends. May they see light in the darkness through the care of those around them who care.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who struggle to deal with grief, mental illness, serious illness and loss of identity. May they find a way to the light of Christ through others who light the way.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Conclusion

We offer these prayers knowing that our needs will be heard and answered. We make our prayer through the power of the Spirit and in the name of Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

Title	AO V1	GA	CWB	CWBII	S&S1
Bring forth the kingdom		478		647	
Come, my way, my truth, my life			656		
Forth in the peace of Christ we go		495	681	489	
God of mercy and compassion		302	692	290	
I heard the voice of Jesus say	54	468		512	
I want to walk as a child of the light				514	
Lord, whose love in humble service			741	551	
O Christ, the healer we have come			759	127	
O come and sing to God, the Lord			761	175	
Out of darkness	134	504			
Praise, my soul, the king of heaven	78		789	588	
Return to God		304		298	
Seek ye first the kingdom of God	48	456		594	
Send down the fire of your justice				389	
Song for human rights				606`	
The gift of the Holy Spirit			823	112	
The living God my shepherd is			827		
Tree of life		307		300	
We are the light					141
We are the light of the world					143

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 111: *A light rises in the darkness for the upright./Alleluia!*

	CWB	JOBA	LPA
Psalm 111	361	pg. 58	pg. 89

Music selections by Michael Mangan

True colours shine (TCS) *based on Mt 5:14-16*) [Gathering, Recessional]

Taking it to the streets (TWB) *based on Mt 5:13-16*) [Gathering, Recessional]

Whatever we do (DOM) *based on Mt 25:34-45* [Gifts, Communion]