

Trinity 18 Thursday 15 October St Teresa

*Matthew 5: 13-19*

Our Gospel reading is taken from end of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. The Sermon begins with the Beatitudes, a set of values which should characterise a true disciple of Jesus. In fact, they can be called a portrait of Jesus himself. They're immediately followed by Jesus telling his disciples these values aren't just for themselves but are to be communicated to the whole world. And Jesus uses some dramatic images to emphasise the impact his disciples are to make on the world.

First, he calls on us to be the "salt of the earth". As Jesus says, salt with no taste is no good and will be thrown out. Salt is a cleansing agent and a preservative. It was a very precious commodity in the time of Jesus. Sometimes used to pay Roman soldiers. The word salary comes from the salt used as wages. The Romans said salt was the purest of all things because it was made from two pure things – the sun and the sea. This purity prevents corruption – it stops food from going bad. So, in a corrupt society disciples are to be distinctive by their moral standards. It also gives flavour.

One of the characteristics of salt is that it's totally absorbed into food so it can't be seen and yet its presence, or absence, is immediately noticeable. This is how Christians are to be present in the world. We're to be fully immersed in it, fully part of it but, at the same time, make a difference through the values of the Gospel. If we make no impact, if we live our Christian vocation in a way purely for ourselves and unnoticed by others, then we're like tasteless salt. So, in an apathetic and negative society we're to bring out the good news – the truth, mercy, love and peace of God. We're called to reveal the joy of living, to show life has flavour. It's a high calling but it's ours.

Light is a common theme in the Bible. In the beginning God said – Let there be light. Psalm 27 describes God himself as light. The Old Testament speaks of Jerusalem as a light for the whole world. Glory would shine out to beckon the nations and they would come in peace to worship the God of Israel. Jesus echoes this when he speaks of a city built on a hill. Jerusalem stood on a ridge – the Jews went up to it year by year on pilgrimage. Their lives were meant to be a visual aid for the world. A lighthouse to gather people to God.

Now Jesus puts this responsibility on his followers. He wants us to be radiant with God's goodness. We do this by living our lives in the way Jesus lived his. No one could say Jesus was invisible. Neither should we be. We're to be like a city built in a hilltop (as Jerusalem was) and visible for miles around. To be like a lamp in a house which, after it's been lit, isn't hidden away. This would be nonsense.

In the ancient world to keep a light burning somewhere was of utmost importance. If your light went out, you had to go and borrow a light from someone else. All lights receive their light from somewhere. We receive light from Jesus. The light we show is a reflected light. Light can expose what many people would prefer to remain hidden. But it also illuminates darkness, allowing people to find their way, do their work, see each other clearly, and appreciate the beauty of creation. The mind-set and lifestyle of a disciple should bring the Christ-light to bear on every aspect of human life.

However just as lamplight can be masked by a cover, so the disciple's impact can be overshadowed by other

preoccupations. We're to be the light of the world and a light that can be seen. To shine out not so people will admire us but so they'll be led to search for the source of that light and find their way to God, the Source and Goal of all being.

When we read Jesus' teaching today, we enter a world of hope that was first Jewish. Jesus invited his hearers to take up the role and heritage God had for Israel. Jesus, above all people, made that heritage real. It focussed on him in a unique way and the then through him has spread wider as millions of people, including us, have come to believe in Jesus. We have become light bearers for God that the ancient family of faith started with the Jews.

One of the reasons Matthew wrote his gospel was to show how this movement which started among the Jews spread beyond Judaism. So, the second part of our reading is on the observance of the Jewish Law, the Law of Moses. The gospel, written by a Jew (or Jews) for Jewish Christians, is to assure them that Jesus' coming doesn't mean the abolition of the Law of Moses but rather its fulfilment. So, Matthew has Jesus

assuring them that not a jot of the old Law will disappear till the end of time. The person who keeps and teaches this Law will be considered great in the Kingdom of God. This is the relationship between the Ten Commandments and their Christian counterpart, the Beatitudes.

But what has become of the idea of light spreading out from Israel?

The answer is: The prophecy is being fulfilled. The spread of faith in Jesus has drawn many from around the world to worship Israel's God. Yet the task still goes on. There's still plenty of darkness and fear. Jesus still invites his followers to be salt and light for the world, to be full of his Spirit and luminous with the light we receive from him.

So how do we do this in today?

We can be filled with the Holy Spirit through the spiritual communion blessing and that can give us the salt we need. Then to be light we could perhaps light a candle and reflect on Jesus as the Light of the World, basking in his light and glory. This will sustain us and enable us to be effective disciples for those around us who are struggling.

Or as Teresa of Avila wrote: Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”