

## **BEING SALT AND LIGHT: 5<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY A**

Brian Gleeson CP

A man called Mike tells a story:-

*Several years ago I was doing a TAFE course. One of the subjects we covered was motivation. We were asked to make a short class presentation, about five minutes long, on a famous person who had motivated others and us. Subjects chosen ranged from Attila the Hun to John F. Kennedy to Martin Luther King, Jr. I was one of the last to speak. I gave my presentation on Jesus Christ. When I had finished I felt embarrassed. I'm not sure why. Had I chosen a poor subject? Had I imposed my opinions on others? I cannot fully explain my feelings at the time, but they were not good. So I just hung my head and said, 'I'm sorry!'*

*Mike goes on. 'I was immediately howled down with cries of 'What for?', 'Don't apologise' and the like. I then realised I had said something worth saying, even if I did not do it well. That was the last time I apologised for being a Christian. My class mates had taught me a valuable lesson.'*

In this roundabout way Mike had discovered just how real, practical, and effective is the teaching of Jesus about being the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

In the time of Jesus salt was connected, in the first place, with purity. So then, if a Christian is to be the salt of the earth, he/she must be an example of purity, single-mindedness and integrity, in thought and speech and behaviour.

By itself salt, however, is useless. You cannot do anything with salt on its own. When you are hungry you cannot eat it. When you are thirsty you cannot drink it. Salt is only useful when it is mixed up with other things, e.g. when it is sprinkled over fish and chips. So Jesus does not say '*You are salt*', and leave it at that. He says: '*You are the salt of the earth.*' As his followers, we are to be mixed up with the earth and the people of the earth. He doesn't expect us to run away and lock ourselves up in an enclosed monastery or convent and have nothing to do with the people outside. That message comes through loudly and clearly in the very popular movie *Sister Act*. On the contrary, the message of Jesus to his followers is to identify with the people around us, to get involved with their lives. This is echoed in the powerful opening words of

Vatican II about the *Church in the Modern World*: '*The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men and women of our time, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well*' (#3).

In the time of Jesus, and before refrigeration, salt was a preservative. It kept meat and fish, e.g. from going bad. So when Jesus says to us. 'Be the salt of the earth', he's asking us to save the world around us, the society to which we belong, from going bad or getting worse than it is already. Recent official enquires into police corruption suggest that it is more necessary than ever to put our beliefs into practice without fear or favour, so as to encourage those we work with or mix with, to act with honesty, integrity, justice and compassion.

In the third place, salt adds flavour. Food without salt or a salt substitute is bland, insipid, unattractive, even depressing. In using this image Jesus is suggesting too that our task, our mission in the world, is not be negative kill-joys, but people like himself, who love life and live it the full, people who care so much, people who love so much, that we bring joy not sadness, hope not gloom, to those we meet daily. Just like Pope Francis does!

Both images Jesus uses - being salt to the earth and light to the world suggest that faith and good deeds, belief and action, cannot be separated. Walking the walk is, in fact, more important than talking the talk. So he says to you and me: Don't hide or water down your love for Christ. Shine it, show it, prove it, do it! Your faith is a gift to be shared with others – with family, friends, colleagues, clients, parishioners, strangers, indeed with all human beings.

The Prayer of St Francis, '*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace ... etc.*', sums up the teaching of Jesus: '*You are the salt of the earth ... you are the light of the world.*' Let us make it our special communion prayer at Holy Communion:

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace: Where there is hatred let me sow love, where there is injury, pardon, where there is doubt, faith, where there is despair, hope, where there is darkness, light, and where there is sadness, joy. O Divine Master, grant that I may not seek so much to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. AMEN.*