



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year A-February 9th 2020

***Readings: Isaiah 58:7-10, Psalm 111, 1 Corinthians 2: 1-5,
Matthew 5: 13-16***

Two powerful images are used by Jesus to describe real disciples.

SALT and LIGHT.

We are familiar with the clichéd appreciation of a good, honest, down to earth, probably working-class man or woman to whom this epithet would be applied.

‘He’s the salt of the earth’.

To the modern mind this label would seem peculiar as a compliment. After all salt is common, abundant, and the cheapest item in the spice cupboard. In order to capture Jesus’ meaning – and implied exhortation, we need to recapture the context of His proclamation to the faithful.

We take salt for granted. Leave it out of your cooking and a soggy tasteless plate awaits the hungry diner. Stand in the chippy and watch the girl cascade heart-stopping quantities of sodium chloride onto your sizzling spuds lathered in Sarson’s tongue tingling acetic acid (Vinegar) and you know exactly why you stopped the car on the way home from the vigil mass.

But salt is much more than a rescuer from gastronomic banality. It was a basic of the ancient and indeed medieval economy. So great was the importance of salt that it is the very origin of our word for salary. The Salarium was primarily a payment in salt.

Unjust taxes on salt led directly to the French Revolution.

The Imperial monopoly on salt in British India and its taxation caused enormous resentment among the natives and poverty.

Salt, in ancient times, was known as ‘White Gold’.

It not only was the key to flavour but, as significant if not more, it was the means of preserving food from times of plenty to times of shortage.

In a pre-industrial era such capacity was the difference between life and death. In addition to these sterling qualities, salt also functioned as a disinfectant and as a healer of wounds and killer of germs.

So, Jesus tells us that, as disciples, we are salt of the earth.

We are, as Pope Francis reminded us, a field hospital for the wounded. A place where healing personally, sacramentally and societally can take place. But that depends upon our direct link to the Divine Healer, Jesus. Healing, binding up, reconciling – these are the work of the Church. We are salt – and rubbing salt in a wound is a painful process but it is the beginning of salvation and healing. As Christians we may indeed cause pain by the application of the ministry of healing. People’s initial reaction may not be gentle or receptive – until they know that it is for their restoration, protection and healing and that it is an act of love. The salt of Christ stops the fatal infection of sin.

Salt is a preservative. It stops things going off. So the Church of God has a similar role. It is not in the business of simplistic conservation – whatever is old is good. It is in the business of ensuring, in season and out of season, the hungry are fed – spiritually and materially. It is the

Tradition – that which is handed on from the Apostles, from Jesus Himself. It is the living truth at the heart of all.

It is not the preservation of Grade II listed buildings but the preservation of fundamentals of divine order that stop society and the people who comprise from going bad.

Salt is savour, taste. It is what flavours what is cooking. It is often invisible, dissolved, apparently disappeared BUT it gives the savour to all that it touches. Salt, Jesus reminds us, that has lost its savour is utterly worthless. True Faith, Real Christianity has the task of flavouring the whole society. If it has no flavour itself, that society will take its flavour from less savoury places. Wishy washy Christianity is the short road to social and personal, rot, tastelessness and corruption. Circumspice. Too much modern Western Christianity is scarcely distinguishable from the secularising rot that infects our continent and allows governments to pass immoral laws and threaten the health of our children. Jesus calls us to be the Salt of the earth.

He calls us to be the light of the world – *lux mundi* – one of His own titles. If, as salt, we can often work invisibly, as light we are out there in full view. We are a city set on a hill; a lamp put on a tub. We cannot operate clandestinely. Indeed, we cannot shine either unless we reflect the light of Jesus.

When someone looks at me as a disciple, he should observe, for all my darkness and weakness, glimpses of the Light of Christ. That, after all, is what attracted you and me to the Faith. Our task, in turn, is to illuminate the seeker after truth. Our task is to shine a light into the darkness indiscriminately.

We are, at once, guides, beacons on the way, penetrators of truth. We are healers, saviours, preserver, flavourers of the places we live.

If we have lost that shocking capacity then we are worse than useless and society, civilisation – without the power of Christ will, like a fish, rot from the head. Watered down Gospel is no gospel at all.

Only a fool puts a light under his bed.

Salt without savour is no more than white dust.

As Jesus says, 'The dunghill awaits'.