

O God,
you know us to be set
in the midst of so many and great dangers,
that by reason of the frailty of our natures
we cannot always stand upright:
grant to us such strength and protection
as may supply us in all dangers
and carry us through all temptations.

Our texts are part of two verses from today's gospel, Matthew 5, verses 13 & 14:

'You are the salt of the earth . . .

You are the light of the world . . .'

Today, Sunday 5th February 2017 can either be designated the Fourth Sunday before Lent or, if you prefer, the Fifth Sunday after Epiphany. Christmas has gone; Easter is still to come. So would you prefer to look forward to Lent and a time of spiritual discipline or back to Epiphany and the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ to the whole world, not just to his people, the Jews ? Well, whatever your preference, today's readings are the same and today my attention was caught not by one but by two verses from Matthews's gospel, part of his account of the Sermon on the Mount: 'You are the salt of the earth . . . You are the light of the world . . .'

Jesus is pointing out two qualities that we should evince as Christians – to be salt and to be light; to be the salt of the earth and to be the light of the world. Both are positive images of what we are truly called to be: to be someone who brings flavour to the life of others; someone who lights up the world around them.

So let's look at salt first. Three qualities: to give flavour; to preserve; to cure. Any cook worth their salt knows how good a little salt can make a dish taste. Salt brings out the flavour of what you are cooking. Without salt, meat, vegetables can seem bland but it's the salt that gives a meal that certain 'je ne sais quoi' ! And salt can make food last longer – salt beef, salted fish will not go off as quick and, in the days before refrigerators in most people's homes, salt helped to extend the shelf-life of your food. Thirdly, salt is something that can help cure an infection: rubbing salt in the wound was what folk used to do – painful clearly but to gargle with salt water can cure a mouth infection in no time. So if Jesus calls us to be the salt of the earth, then we would be people who create a joie de vivre, a taste for life that preserves and cures and makes things so much better for our presence.

And, secondly, to be the light of the world. Well, to bring light to dark places is obviously going to make things better for all concerned. If we are light-hearted, then we are going to cheer folk up with the radiance of our presence. Of course, we ourselves are not the source of that light, merely mirrors who reflect that light. Jesus himself is the true light of the world and we, as Christians, his disciples, are merely reflecting to others what shines in our own lives – his light, the light of his presence with us.

But there is a warning. The light should not be hidden nor should the salt lose its flavour. No one in the right mind would put a lighted candle in a cupboard or under a table but on a lamp stand where its light can be seen. And how on earth does salt loses its flavour – has salt a sell-by date ? Actually it's rock salt left out in the sun that the heat dries up which then has no taste.

So I am really encouraged today by Jesus' challenge to us to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world – to be truly useful to others.

And my question: Am I ? Are we ? Are you ?

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

5th February 2017

G: Sermons 35 :Useful

