

## Reflection for the 10<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of the Year

FIRST READING: 2 Corinthians 1:18-22

A reading from the second Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians:

Brothers and sisters: As God is faithful, our word to you is not “yes” and “no.” For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was proclaimed to you by us, Silvanus and Timothy and me, was not “yes” and “no,” but “yes” has been in him. For however many are the promises of God, their Yes is in him; therefore, the Amen from us also goes through him to God for glory. But the one who gives us security with you in Christ and who anointed us is God; he has also put his seal upon us and given the Spirit in our hearts as a first installment.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 119:129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 135

***Lord, let your face shine on me.***

Wonderful are your decrees; therefore I observe them.

***Lord, let your face shine on me.***

The revelation of your words sheds light, gives understanding to the simple.

***Lord, let your face shine on me.***

I gasp with open mouth in my yearning for your commands.

***Lord, let your face shine on me.***

Turn to me in pity as you turn to those who love your name.

***Lord, let your face shine on me.***

Steady my footsteps according to your promise, and let no iniquity rule over me.

***Lord, let your face shine on me.***

Let your countenance shine upon your servant, and teach me your statutes.

***Lord, let your face shine on me.***

Gospel: Matthew 5:13-16

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew:

Jesus said to his disciples: “You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city set on a

mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

### **Reflection for the 10<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of the Year**

I have been a preacher since I was ordained a deacon in 1978. How much of my preaching is me and how much is God? I choose and use the words I speak. Yet, I maintain that the message that I preach is God’s word as I have experienced it. One of my first homiletics teachers was the late Willard Jabusch. If his name is unfamiliar, perhaps some of his music is; “Whatsoever You Do” and “The King of Glory.” He was a priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago and, during my time in the seminary, was on the faculty of the University of Saint Mary of the Lake. He encouraged us, as then future preachers, to put “pizzazz” in the pulpit. He often remarked that, for many preachers, the Word remains words and never becomes flesh. Over the four decades of my preaching I have striven to make God’s Word clear and relate to the lives we lead, hopefully with some modest success. If I have, it has been by the grace of God. In my reading of Paul today, I hear him voicing a similar dynamic. He is the preacher but he speaks God’s word as faithfully as he can.

The gospel is not about the preacher. To share the gospel with others is what preaching is all about. Being interesting, as a speaker, is both a God given talent and a spirit entrusted skill. Talents are innate. Skills need practice. I took piano lessons as a kid and know this well. For a preacher to be effective, we need to pray and prepare. Scripture is the basis for those but so are other sources. I knew a priest from Boston who carried a spiral notebook in his shirt pocket. If he saw, heard or experienced something that struck him as special, he made note of it for future use in preaching. I heard him preach a few times and was impressed. To ground the biblical texts in people’s real lives and experience is the purpose of preaching. Jesus the Word became flesh in our lives, not just in the world.

Having said this, there is no ambivalence in God’s word. God is infinite, eternal, unconditional and always faithful. God has given us God’s gift of faith. We believe. Because of faith we receive God’s forgiveness and the promise of eternal life. As God’s beloved children and as Jesus’ beloved siblings, there is no ambivalence in God’s gifts. They are not yes and no. Jesus said yes to God’s plan of salvation that led to his cross and resurrection. God’s love is always yes to us. Jesus blood is the promise’s seal. The Holy Spirit always leads us to God when we’ve strayed. God will never say no to those who approach for forgiveness.

God's love for us is the reason we try to do better or just try again when we've sinned. For years I've always been uneasy with those who claimed to be "born again." Often they can point to a specific date when they first "knew Jesus." I always point out that salvation is an on-going process in our lives that begins with our first breath, continues with our baptism and subsequent sacraments and unfolds throughout the lives we lead. Being born again is an ongoing process that ends when we return to God in death and will culminate when Jesus returns to establish the kingdom of God. Paul spoke of the coming to faith as being but the first installment of the Spirit's presence. We grow closer to God each day, because each day brings us one day closer to death. We also grow closer to God in affect. We seek for God's presence, constantly, as we live life. We seek God most expressly when we seek meaning in what seems to be the meaninglessness of life's experiences. In the past year, haven't we all sought that?

Our life's experience may be filled with ambivalence. We may try our best to do what's right only to discover, later, we've made a horrible mistake. We are all human and fallible. Self deception is as prevalent as believing the spin doctors of advertising and politics. It is only in the compassion and mercy of God that we find stability. God forgives those who seek mercy. That will never change. Everything that happens, all that we choose, all those we meet and all we do are gifts of God's grace. We don't have to like all we experience. We can discover God's presence in all our experiences. We define holiness as knowing God's presence not by our preferences.

What does being called the "salt of the earth" mean? Most of the time we think it means being common or ever present. I suppose it can, but can salt ever not be salty? All of us have the salinity in our blood that matches the saltiness of the world's oceans. Salt is essential for our lives. The chemical notation of table salt is NaCl, sodium chloride. Salt is made up of two elements on the periodic table, sodium and chlorine. Both, by themselves alone, are poisonous. Sodium is a reactive metal and chlorine is a toxic gas. When combined into salt, they become very stable and need some catalyst to change from being table salt.

Having done some minimal research on this, from one good biblical commentary I read and on Google, I discovered that salt is necessary for a strong and hot dung fire. Dung fired ovens were very common in Jesus' day. They are still common and very important in the developing world. Dung is a very ancient renewable source of fuel. Livestock and people produce the basic resource each day simply by eating and living. Dung is dried feces. For a dung fired oven to work, a slab of salt makes the oven's floor. It acts as a catalyst for a good, hot fire. Over time, the chemical interaction of the fire's heat and the various chemical residues of the ash cause a chemical change in the salt. Impurities become part of the slab's

components and begin to act as a fire retardant. It is then that the salt stops being salt. Only when salt is used as a catalyst for some other chemical process does its nature, saltiness alter. Jesus did not mean this though.

Faith in Jesus is the heart of Jesus' parable. We all believe. All those since the time of Jesus believed. We have inherited, in a real way, faith that has come to us from Jesus himself, through the apostles and through our parents. We become the means of the transmission of faith to the next generations. This is no common, ordinary feat. This is something unique, special and profound. Becoming the salt of the earth reveals the glory of God as God's plan for the kingdom is in the process of taking root in our lives and growing into the world.

Jesus also called us the light of the world. What does that mean? Today we take electric illumination for granted. The room is dark; switch on the lights. Few of us have any idea of just how dark a moonless, starless night can be. It's only when the power grid goes down that we have any idea what it's like. Thank God, it doesn't happen that often. How are we the light of the world? Jesus' parables are never digital; they are always analog. He used examples and images that have grounding in people's experiences. Salt and light are things we know. They are both necessary for life on earth. They are concrete examples we all know. We have never seen God or heard God's voice, but we see with sunlight during the day and with electricity at night. Salt gives flavor to food which we can enjoy.

The light, we learned in the Gospel of John, is Jesus and is God become a human being. The light is God's movement and presence in our world. We are the means, as was Jesus, for people to witness and know God's presence in the world now. God shows in our behavior. Because we believe, God works in us. The images that Jesus has used, in his parable of light, are powerful. A city on the hill can be seen for miles. Chicago is a city built on a flood plain that drains into Lake Michigan until the engineers reworked the rivers to flow backward and flow to the Mississippi river. It is not in a hill, but there are locations in our area where the downtown skyscrapers can be seen as if it were. As a kid I always delighted to see the twin towers of Marina City from the crest of the hill in Horner Park. Sometimes as I drive toward the city on the Stevenson Expressway I notice the skyline. I will note that as a whole, I keep my eyes on the road, not the view.

In Jesus' day, there were no electric lamps. There were only lamps with open flames. To place a lamp under a basket of any kind would most definitely result in a fire. Who would want to burn down their own home? Every one would know the absurdity of Jesus' example. There is one exception. I put myself through school by working as a janitor and maintenance man at St. Benedict's in Chicago. I had the job of cleaning and changing the classroom florescent lights. The newer ones had ballasts, the older ones had starters. When those components failed, I

changed them. The easier job was to replace a starter. It was a small component that would twist out and then twist in to a socket. A new ballast required re-wiring the fixture. I'm curious by nature and wanted to see what was inside a starter. All it took to get it apart was a screwdriver or pen knife. It had a small neon bulb that produced the proper voltage surge to begin the process of florescence in the main bulbs. That was one light, hidden that was necessary for greater light.

God has said "yes" to us in giving us life and birth. We have faith that grows within us. God's "yes" is continual and not a one time deal and lasts for eternity. We respond through the lives we lead. Our actions give witness to God's "yes." We say "Amen" when we close our prayers, in Jesus' name. We respond "Amen" to receive communion. What does it mean? It is an ancient Hebrew word and can mean so be it, in truth or I believe. Our witness is our "Amen" to God too. The Spirit works with, in through and among us to remain the "salt" and "light" to the world.

May our experiences be the means of knowing God's presence, the Spirit's guidance and Jesus life.

James D. Beath

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