

5th Sunday (A)

5th February 2017

'In the world, but not of the world'

Is 58: *Then will your light shine like the dawn.
claimed to have was of Christ crucified.*

1Cor 2: *the only knowledge I*

Mt 5:13–16: *salt of the earth ... light of the world ...*

As I said last week, the area of the Lake of Galilee is a most special and moving place to visit in the Holy Land. Galilee is that whole area in the North of Israel where Jesus grew began His ministry: Nazareth, Capernaum, Gennesaret, Magdala, Cana, Tiberias; places we've all heard of from the Gospel and the place of the Sermon on the Mount. Something I read on Galilee a while back pointed out the wide range of examples from daily Galilean life that Jesus uses in His preaching, to explain His message. It listed no fewer than 29 things: “wedding clothes and traditions; wineskins; sawdust in the eye; bad fruit trees; bad building foundations; ravens & lilies; ploughing ...” the list goes on and on ... “house lamps ... useless salt ...” These last two are the images that crop up in the Gospel today.

As He continues His Sermon on Mount, after the Beatitudes, Jesus uses two images to inspire His disciples as He continues His sermon: *salt of the earth* and *light of the*

world. Both of these images would have been familiar to His hearers: salt as the essential preserver of food in a hot country long before the days of refrigeration; and the oil-lamp, the only light in a household after dark, placed on a lampstand to light the whole house. They are very different — complementary — images of what His people are to be.

SALT. Just as salt was an essential commodity, pervading the food it must preserve, and has to flavour and season it by being thoroughly absorbed, so the Christian is to be in the world, being precisely what preserves society, saves society ... by being the holy one in the midst of all others. We are called to be thoroughly immersed in the world and yet at the same time raising it up! Without us — without the essential presence of the faith in society, the world goes rotten, its flavour goes bad. That is the importance of who we are: we are the salt of the earth: the ones who by faith and by prayer and by example actually give a divine flavour to the world; We do not let it go thoroughly rotten, because we preserve it as a place filled with the grace and Spirit of Christ. We, in our bodies, and

in our lives, and in our behaviour.

LIGHT. But we are also called to be light of the world. This is complementary to the previous image. As light, we must stand out, be utterly different, be raised up high on a stand, shine the way for all to see. We must be lit by a flame of something worthy and true; fired with a faith that gives warmth and joy to those around. Light is a beacon for others to see and by which they can see. It's a service to them, and a guide and something truly good.

So, as the saying goes, and as these two images imply, we are to be *in the world, but not of the world*: 'in' the world, like salt, friendly, affable, humane and attractive people, bringing a wholesomeness to society by being true to the Lord; and at the same time, 'not of' the world, like light, something heavenly and radiant and 'from above,' which challenges the world to achieve and follow something far higher, the light of the Lord. To be both, is the greatest challenge of the Gospel!! To be in the world, loving it, and helping it; and not of the world, keeping a certain distance and knowing that we are only pilgrims in this life.

Pope Benedict published two books of interviews with a German journalist — in fact, I think there's now a third, published just before Christmas — and the first two are entitled: *Salt of the Earth* (1997) and *Light of the World* (2010). He too sees that these images are important to the Catholic, balancing the world and faith. We truly have something to give to the world that it cannot have otherwise. God has something to give to the world that He cannot give except through faith and with our co-operation. We are not passive bystanders; God uses us as the salt and the light. He uses you to invigorate the world with the Gospel. Do not imagine that your faith is worthless; it's only worthless if you let the salt grow tasteless and your light go out! Don't let it! Remember how important you are to those around you, as a person of faith: they rely on you; they need your strength and prayer, your charity and your hope. You must give that flavour to life that comes from an understanding of what God made us for; and you must shed that clear light on life by having a vision of heaven as our intended destiny. Jesus is counting on you to be that salt and light!