



Introduction

Deacon Michael J. Walsh, from St. John of the Cross Parish in Middlebury, shared these reflections on the 5th Sunday in Ordinary time, a Sunday whose readings convey a powerful message about discipleship and social justice. From Isaiah:

“Thus says the LORD: Share your bread with the hungry, shelter the oppressed and the homeless; clothe the naked when you see them, and do not turn your back on your own. And from

Matthew: “Jesus said to his disciples: “You are the salt of the earth . . . You are the light of the world.”

*The Bishops’ document, *Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish*, reminds us that “the Church’s social mission is an essential measure of every parish community . . .” Hopefully these reflections will offer some ideas that will help us to understand our calling as disciples, and what that means for our mission in the world today.*

Reflections for the 5th Sunday Ordinary Time, February 9, 2014

Deacon Michael J. Walsh

St. John of the Cross Church, Middlebury, CT

Recently I came across a story about a young man who was born and raised as a Hindu, who in his early 20’s decided to convert and become a Catholic. His decision cost him dearly. It alienated him from his own family and many of his friends. When he was asked what it was that allowed him to take such a costly step, he said he was moved by the work he saw being done by Mother Teresa’s Sisters of Charity in the slums of Calcutta.

What he saw made him want whatever power it was that enabled these women to give up marriage and family, career and independence... and dedicate their entire lives to serving the poorest of Calcutta’s poor. The Sisters said that power was Jesus Christ, and the young man believed what they told him. No one preached to him. No one tried to convert him. It was the kindness and compassion he saw in a group of dedicated but ordinary women led that young man to Christ.

Most of us would probably describe ourselves as ordinary people. We have our ups and downs, our strengths and weaknesses... and maybe even an exceptional moment every now and then. But for the most part, we lead pretty ordinary lives. Sometimes we might think a little too ordinary. We think we don’t have what it takes to do God’s work in the world today. Our readings today tell us that we do.

In our Gospel, Jesus uses salt and light to describe the qualities of his disciples. Of all the seasonings, salt is the most common... the most ordinary. But in ancient times, it was critical to life. It was so valuable that it was known as white gold. It had all kinds of uses. It not only

enhanced the flavor of food, it preserved it from spoiling. As a commodity, it was traded and used to barter on the open market. It was used to pay wages. And salt also had another quality. It made people thirst.

When Jesus compares his disciples to salt, he's telling us that we may be ordinary in the eyes of the world, but we are valuable to him. And if we let him... if we trust him... He will use us to add flavor to the world... and keep it healthy... he'll use us to make people thirst for more of God.

Of all life's necessities, light is one of the most basic... and one of the most essential. When Jesus describes us as the light of the world, he's saying that we're the ones he's chosen to make him visible to others. People are going to look at us... at how we act... and what we say... and how we treat one another... and form their opinion of him. We are called to penetrate the darkness in the world by being good ourselves and by doing good for others. That's when our light shines most brightly. That's how we lead people to Christ.

In our first reading, Isaiah explains what it means for us to be salt and light. It means to share our food with the hungry... to provide shelter for the homeless... and clothing for those who need it. It means to be merciful, to be kind and compassionate, to reach out to society's neediest and most vulnerable members... which, in our culture, includes both those who are alive in the world and those who are alive in the womb.

And if we do these things, the Light of Jesus Christ will shine brightly in the world. It will shine in us and through us and around us. And we will stand out... in sharp contrast to the darkness that surrounds us.

2000 years ago, a small group of ordinary men went out into the world and told the story about the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. People liked what they heard and the Church grew so that now there are 1.2 billion Catholics in the world. But the work begun by those first disciples is far from over.

Their mission is now our mission. God expects us to keep the story alive. Why us? Because we are all that he has. He doesn't expect us to go out and save the world. That's already been done. He expects us to season it ... to give it some zest ... to make it better.

We are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. We're the salt that preserves the life of Christ in the world. We're the light that casts aside the darkness and shines brightly before others so that people might see the good we do and give glory to God.

Just as a pinch of salt is all that it takes to make food taste better, our slightest efforts to end poverty, injustice and oppression... our simplest acts of kindness and compassion... become beacons that shine through the darkness in a fallen world and fill it with the light of Christ.