

February 9, 2014

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight, oh Lord our strength and our Redeemer.”

Today's Gospel from Matthew is a portion of probably the greatest homily ever given.....our Lord's Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount is anglicized from the Matthean Vulgate (that is everyday Latin) *Sermo in monte*. The writing is a collection of the early sayings of Jesus, emphasizing his moral teachings.

Today's Gospel is the first of Five Discourses of Matthew and describes events that took place relatively early in the Ministry of Jesus after he has been baptized by John the Baptist and after he has preached in Galilee.

Jesus says to his audience: You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled on.

Does anyone know why would Jesus call us “salt”? Why not pepper or mayo or how about you are the ketchup of the earth? What’s the big deal with salt? Today I will share one perspective of what it means for us to be the salt of the earth.

A few summers ago I was in the back yard building a wooden trellis for pole beans to climb as they grew. I had out power tools, a saw, a drill and a hammer. As I was working, hammering away, our neighbor's son, Luke, stopped playing in his back yard, and began to intently watch the deacon as he worked.

I was pleased and somewhat surprised, that the young boy would want to learn from my limited craftsmanship, but trying to be friendly I said to Luke “I see you watching me there. Are you interested in how to build things out of wood?” “No” Luke replied, “I’m just waiting to hear what a deacon says when he hits his thumb with a hammer.”

Life has a way of telling us that people are paying attention to us, but sometimes to things we don’t even realize they are observing. Today we are going to talk about how this observation plays out in our Christian lives.

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled on.

What does this mean in terms of how we are seen as Christians?

In biblical times salt served a number of functions. It was a limited resource, and therefore a very valuable commodity. In fact we get our word "salary" from the ancient Latin term "salarium" – which is the portion of salary that was paid in salt to the Roman soldiers.

The first use of salt is that it preserves things – it preserves goodness. One of the most important functions of salt in the time of Christ was that salt kept things from going bad, from spoiling. We live in a time of refrigerators, but just a few generations ago people had to rely upon salt to keep their meats from going bad before they could eat them.

As Christians, we are entrusted with preserving goodness in the world. We must ask ourselves, what am I doing to preserve goodness around me? As Christians, we are marked people. Those around us are watching us, looking in on our lives to see how we act and react. Our friends, family and coworkers hear the stories we tell and the jokes we pass on. They see how we treat other people, and, whether we like it or not, in that moment we represent what it means to be a Christian in their minds. As a body of believers we must commit ourselves to preserving goodness. We as people may be the only Bible some people are willing or able to read.

As we all know, salt is widely used to enhance flavor – it serves the item to which it is added. We, as Christians are called to add zest to the lives of those around us.

We are called to be seen by others as living examples of the power and grace of God, examples which others are encouraged to follow. This is sometimes seen as the messy part of our faith, where we have to get dirty and meet people where they are.

What good is salt if you never get it out of the shaker? It has to be mixed in with things, so it can interact and add to what is already going on in both cooking and in life.

I am told that when one is cooking, salt by itself isn't a useful thing. You have to take the salt, measure it, add it into what you are cooking and give it a good stir. As salt to the world, we mix in the flavor of God into our everyday activities.

Imagine ourselves at the grocery store on the advertised double discount day. Walking up and down the aisles sampling new products. Of course grocery stores do this to tempt us to buy something new, to try something different.

By living out our faith, we do this too. We allow other people to get a taste for something better. Our values are always expressed in our actions. What is truly important is the way values find expression in our daily lives.

This is what Jesus alludes to in his image of us, his followers, as salt of the earth. Those who hold the values of the Kingdom will witness to those around them the reality of Christ's vision for our lives.

A third perspective of salt is that it inspires thirst.

We as Christians are to make others thirsty for the living water – for Christ. Jesus says “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

This past Thursday, I had the pleasure and privilege of attending the Sandwich Board here at Trinity. I have many years of experience with helping at soup kitchens and feeding the needy....but the experience here is different.

There was an atmosphere of mutual respect throughout the two hour period for which I was a witness and participant. Whether it be client, community helpers, visiting parish and Trinity folk, there was just a sense of working together to serve the Kingdom. No sense of "do you realize how much we are doing for you? No factions within the client community...

The whole experience was one of members of our human experience caring for each other. ...and I can guarantee I was fed as much as any person in that room ....and I did not even participate in the lunch.

The food at the sandwich board was well salted....and is clearly preserved as a ministry for the long haul.

During the Eucharist you could hear a pin drop throughout the service. One sensed a spiritual feeding during the twenty minute liturgy and the visiting celebrant was clearly energized by the experience.

Very few persons, physically, took communion but the Eucharist added salt to the luncheon experience, there was a sense of close attention in the room.

There were a range of thirsts at the sandwich board: A thirst for warmth, nurture and sharing ...and not only from the clients. A thirst to give of themselves from the volunteers. A thirst from many perspectives to invite the world to participate in the kingdom.

Life truly has a way of telling us that people are paying attention to us, and sometimes to things we don't even realize they are observing. As Christians I encourage us to reveal to the world our true selves, our thirsts and our abilities to satisfy those thirsts. I urge us to reach out and provide salt to our community.....and that means the whole world.

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled on.

Do not keep the salt a secret , be observant of others' needs and be selfless in giving of the salt to others.

That way we maintain a freshness and thirst for the love of Christ in our lives.  
.....Amen