

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time – February 5, 2017 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 58:7-10

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. Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your wound shall quickly be healed; your vindication shall go before you, and the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer, you shall cry for help, and he will say: Here I am! If you remove from your midst oppression, false accusation and malicious speech; if you bestow your bread on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted; then light shall rise for you in the darkness, and the gloom shall become for you like midday.

Psalm: 112:4-5, 6-7, 8-9

R. (4a) The just man is a light in darkness to the upright.

Light shines through the darkness for the upright;
he is gracious and merciful and just.
Well for the man who is gracious and lends,
who conducts his affairs with justice.

R. The just man is a light in darkness to the upright.

He shall never be moved;
the just one shall be in everlasting remembrance.
An evil report he shall not fear;
his heart is firm, trusting in the LORD.

R. The just man is a light in darkness to the upright.

His heart is steadfast; he shall not fear.
Lavishly he gives to the poor;
His justice shall endure forever;
his horn shall be exalted in glory.

R. The just man is a light in darkness to the upright.

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, proclaiming the mystery of God, I did not come with sublimity of words or of wisdom. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear and much trembling, and my message and my proclamation were not with persuasive words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of Spirit and power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

Gospel: Matthew 5:13-16

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.”

Prayer for a New Bishop

Heavenly Father,
You have blessed our diocese time and again with good and holy bishops who have led us ever closer to you. Aware of your profound love for us, we ask you to bless us once again. Send us a good and holy man to become our next bishop. Inspire us, the clergy, religious and the laity of the diocese to work generously with him so that we might grow together in your love and continue the good work you have begun in us for the sake of all. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

In the Gospels of the last four Sundays we have been following the story of Jesus' early career. He went to be baptized. Then he moved from Galilee to Capernaum, when he heard that John the Baptist had been killed. He chose his apostles there (they somehow knew he was the one they wanted to go with). Last Sunday we heard part of his "inaugural address," the beatitudes. Now, this Sunday, Jesus begins to instruct the disciples about how to be his followers. In our Gospel he says: be what you are. This is consoling advice. You get to be yourself! He gives images. If you are like salt, then don't lose your flavor. If you are a lamp, then don't put a basket over yourself so no one can see your light. In sum, give taste and give light. But would the disciples have followed Jesus if they had known what it really meant to "be yourself"? The First Reading says to share your bread with the hungry. Shelter the oppressed and the homeless. Clothe the naked. Do not turn away from your own. This is how you let your light shine in the darkness. This is how Jesus enlightened the world. He even went to death for it. So this is the meaning of "becoming yourself." A big assignment. In our own day, "I just want to be me," sounds selfish. "I get to do whatever I want whenever I want." "Take care of number one." "If it feels good, do it." And so on.

In the recent culture of the United States, one of the classic songs made popular by Frank Sinatra is "I Did It My Way," co-written by Sinatra and Paul Anka. "I planned each charted course, each careful step, along the byway, and more, much more than this, I did it my way." And so on. The main message is that "I" have succeeded in life because it is *mine*. No one dared to interfere with me. I did everything "my way." There is a backdrop of fear in this, something about not being free to be myself, having to do everything according to someone else's design.

The world and its population are very, very large and it is no surprise that mass production and mass advertising and mass purchasing give us the feeling that we are just cogs in a wheel: a giant, international, industrial wheel, worth very little in ourselves but contributing to the market as long as we do and buy what is dictated. So, "to do it my way" could be a statement about facing down the great machine and defying it outright. The scriptures assume the opposite. They suppose that every human being is created with an unrepeatable, deep, interior shape. Rather than having to fight to do my own will, I need to allow the Spirit of God to find a home within the space that is me. This Spirit does not invade me, it is the essence of loving, of respect, of forgiveness. It is God. You and I are built to be at one with this presence. Becoming myself means becoming what I was built to be: a home for the Spirit of Jesus and of God. God's love becomes us. It will help us find ourselves as what we really are deep down: givers of food, helpers to the homeless, forgiving and loving members of society.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. "Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your wound shall quickly be healed." What does binding the wounds of others have to do with your own wounds? Who benefits when people share their bread or shelter the homeless? Explain
2. Can we see, using human wisdom alone, how crucifixion can triumph over sin and death? If not, then what allows us to see beyond human appearances? Did Paul want our faith to rest on the power of God instead of elaborate arguments?
3. Jesus asked us to be like light and salt. What determines our degree of saltiness or brightness?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

Keep your family safe, O Lord, with unfailing care, that, relying solely on the hope of heavenly grace, they may be defended always by your protection. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen