

Bishop Bradley's Reflections on the Sunday Readings

February 9, 2020 Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

In spite of Punxsutawney Phil's predictions last Sunday for an early Spring, and even though we had a taste of mild, spring-like weather at the beginning of the week, Winter has returned in full force these past few days as a reality check. So perhaps as last Sunday's Super Bowl LIV, played in sunny/warm Miami, helped us feel less wintry, perhaps many are counting on watching tonight's "92nd Oscar Awards" to lift our human spirits. We can always hope.

The Scripture Readings we just heard for this Fifth Sunday of the Year give us another, and far more important, hope to pursue---the vision that God's Word and the Good News of Jesus calls all of us who are baptized into Christ to share. The theme of all the Readings from God's Word today is that of looking forward with hope, enabled to live in God's Light, and not to live in fear, nor in the darkness of gloom and doubt.

In the First Reading, we heard the Prophet Isaiah give very strong directions: "*Share your bread with the hungry; Shelter the oppressed and the homeless; Clothe the naked when you see them; Do not turn your back on your own.*" Along with that strong teaching, Isaiah also makes sure that we understand what the consequences are for doing those acts of charity, and for showing such compassion to those in need. He says: When you do all of that, "*THEN, your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your wound shall quickly be healed;....THEN you shall call, and the Lord will answer...and He will say: 'Here I am!'*"

The Psalm Response repeats that same theme with the beautiful words: "*The just man is a light in darkness to the upright!*", and each of the verses of that Psalm emphasize how good deeds and a virtuous life, such as "*those who are gracious, those who lend to others, those who lavishly give to the poor, and those who conduct their own affairs with justice----* are as welcome to others as is **Light** shining in **darkness**.

That's the theme that continues in today's Gospel as well which is taken from the beginning verses of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Right before the verses we heard today, Jesus began His great Sermon by teaching what we know as the Beatitudes, and Jesus concludes that great list of "blesseds" by teaching that the reward for living according to the Beatitudes will be "great in Heaven". So in today's Gospel, Jesus continues that same Sermon on the Mount by telling

His disciples---and all of us baptized into Jesus' life---to be "*the salt of the earth*" and "*the light of the world*".

What's the purpose of salt? What's the purpose of light? The purpose for each is to enrich--to make better---whatever salt or light touches. I doubt that very few people sit down to a big bowl of salt, right? Salt adds to the taste of other foods, and it can enhance that food, or ruin it, depending on the amount of salt that is used. If your potatoes don't have salt, they taste bland; but if there's too much salt, they become inedible. That's why we talk about a "pinch" of salt, or a "dash" of salt---just the right amount of salt. And if we don't use it to flavor or preserve our food, Jesus tells us that the only other use is what we've all probably been doing with it in these days of winter---throwing it on our roads, driveways and sidewalks to help give us traction and to melt the snow.

It's the same with light. If there's no light, we can't see at all; if there's too much, we can be blinded. So we need just the right amount of light so that we can carry on our other important daily activities. As Jesus says so clearly, we would not light a lamp and then stick it under a bushel basket or in a closet; rather we put it on a lampstand so that everyone in the house can see clearly.

So, the obvious message for all of us today is that we need to be the salt of the earth, and to let your light shine before others. Just as Isaiah taught, Jesus also teaches that there are consequences to our actions. As He said, "*Just so, our light must shine before others so that they may see your good deeds, and give glory to your heavenly Father.*"

Of course, that means more than just being able to physically "see" the good deeds that are being done. What Isaiah and Jesus both mean is that when we do good deeds---when we help those in need, or when we perform any of what we have come to know as the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, freeing the oppressed, welcome the stranger; forgiving offences, comforting the afflicted, counseling the doubtful and instructing those needing education-----when we "see" that the reason why we are doing those good deeds is because the people we are helping are children of God and brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ-----THEN our Heavenly Father will be glorified, and perhaps other people will be inspired to do those same good works.

Thinking about the Oscar Awards this evening when the focus is on those who are on the "red carpet" and in the spotlight, and on those who are the winners and the losers, we should

not be doing good works for those same reasons. We shouldn't "be the salt of the earth", or "let our light shine in the world" so that we can be recognized or win awards; we do what we do because Jesus teaches us that is the way of holiness, and that is how we, like Him, bring light to our world which is in so much darkness. We don't do our good deeds, with the hope that God will notice and love us more (which of course is impossible since He already loves us unconditionally and beyond any merit of our own), or that God will forgive our sins (which of course He does without any persuasion when we are truly repentant). No, we add "salt" to enhance others' lives, and we let our "light" shine so they can see God working in us; we do good deeds because we are trying to imitate our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and because Jesus has taught us that doing so is the way to become blessed/holy/and ultimately, it's the way to have our reward be great in Heaven.

When we bring God's Love to those in need, and Light to those in darkness, we are doing far more than winning Oscars or other worldly accolades; we will truly "*glorify our heavenly Father*", and win the award of Eternal Life in Heaven.

God bless you, now and always!