

Fifth Sunday Ordinary Time – Homily

Have you ever wondered what type of speech you would give if you were a head coach and your team was about to play in the Super Bowl?

There are a few pre-game speeches that any general sports fan could likely recall as one of the most inspiring speeches in history. The most notable would probably be Notre Dame's Knute Rockne "Win one for the Gipper" speech. But my personal favorite is coach Herb Brook's speech to the US Olympic hockey team before the 1980 game against the Russians.

So what does a coach say to a team right before they play in the biggest game of their lives? We can imagine that all great coaches focus on three things...

- They choose their words carefully,
- They keep their message simple and understandable,
- And they stay true to who they are.

Today's Gospel shows Jesus choosing his words carefully... These words are a part of the Sermon on the Mount, the most important of all His sermons.

Jesus emphasizes the expectations of discipleship... He points out that the life-mission of a disciple is to be salt and light for the world around them.

The images of salt and light were easily understandable to the audience Jesus was addressing.

In the ancient world Salt had two important functions: it gave flavor to food, and it also preserved food. Because they could not keep food cold the ancients would preserve their meat and fish by putting a thin layer of salt over it.

Light also had an important function: Light pushed back the darkness of the night. In the ancient world, once the sun set darkness was a much more dramatic reality than it is to us. Even with a lamp very little could be seen. To the ancient the darkness was a constant reminder of how helpless one was.

The images of Salt and Light were not just intended for the people of Jesus time. They are applicable to our time and especially to our mission as Disciples of Christ.

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We might think that salt and light have different purposes. However, if we look closely we can see that in meeting different needs, there is a common characteristic that they share.

- Both light and salt are *for something else*, their purpose is not self-centered, but other-centered.
- And this is where they speak truthfully to the person that Christ is and what mattered most to Him... Others

Our mission in the world, just like Christ's mission, is to make a positive difference for others, and we do this by bringing the power and the illumination of the gospel to them.

If God is calling each of us to make a real, everlasting difference in the lives of others by illuminating the Gospel, then it must be possible for us to do it.

But how?

Paul's letter to the Corinthians points to the very existence of the community at Corinth, and the way they lived the Gospel, as the most persuasive argument for the power of God.

The power of the Holy Spirit alive in us is the best way to persuade others that the power of God can make a difference in their lives too. It is a reminder that a lively faith is not based on a theory or winning a philosophical argument. It is the result of an encounter with a person... the person of Jesus Christ.

- To be salt and light... to be that positive difference for others we must encounter Christ, and allow him to flavor us.
- Jesus does not call us to produce our own light, we are rather to shine with the reflection of His light.
- The radiance that shines from us, comes from the presence of Christ in our hearts.

So when Jesus says that we must be the light of the world, what does he mean?

- The primary duty of a light is to be seen.
 - There can be no such thing as "secret discipleship," our Christianity should be perfectly visible to all.

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- Further, this Christianity must be visible in the ordinary activities of our life...
 - We are called to be a Christian in the factory, the workshop, the shipyard, the mine, the classroom, the operating room, on the golf course, and on the playing field.
 - Our light... our faith should be evident to all, in all that we do...
Not just in Church on Sunday
- A secondary duty of light is to be a guide that makes the way clear.
 - We are called to make the way clear for others by being an example.
 - One of the things this world needs more than anything else is people who are prepared to be a nucleus of goodness.
 - One of the greatest blessings for me has been having the privilege of guiding the candidates and catechumens, and their sponsors in our RCIA class.
 - Every Thursday I have been blessed to experience their goodness and light as they seek to understand the truths of our faith.
- Finally a light must also act as a warning signal.
 - It is a signal of caution that tells us to slowdown or halt when there is danger ahead.
 - It is our duty to warn others of obstacles that will prevent them from being salt and light.
- The light which can be seen, the light that guides, and the light which warns, these are the lights that we as disciples are called to be.

We are called to shine for God and in doing so we must always remember the following...

- Others are to see our good deeds.
 - Our good deeds are called to be more than just “good” as the world knows goodness.
 - Our good deeds must be flavored by God’s standards of goodness.
 - That means that they must be beautiful and attractive to others.
 - We must never seek to draw the eyes of others to ourselves...
 - We are always to reflect the beauty, goodness, and attractiveness of God.

So tonight as you settle in to watch the Super Bowl consider the following...

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- We have a great coach...
 - Jesus has prepared us to play in the biggest game of our lives.
- For us kick-off is when we leave this Church.
 - And as we leave we should realize that we carry him with us... He has promised to never leave us.
 - He has chosen his words carefully, and his message is simple and clear...
 - Go and be salt and light to the world.
- The only question that needs to be answered is... Are we ready to play in the only game that matters?