

Breaking Open the Word of Faith

Good News Reflections for the Sundays of February, 2017

by Terry A . Modica



5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

February 5, 2017

Read:

Isaiah 58:7-10

Psalms 112:4-9

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Matthew 5:13-16



Reflect:

Jesus tells us: "You are the salt of the earth." What does it mean to be salt? Think about what salt does. It adds flavor to foods that lack sufficient taste.

Jesus also raises the point that if we lose our flavor, how can it be restored? The answer is: Only by letting God renew us.

In your baptism, you were made flavorful -- alive with God's love, peace, joy, etc. Fruitful Christians are those who evangelize by adding the seasoning of God's life -- God's love, peace, joy, etc. -- to the lives of the people around them.

But beware of trying too hard! What happens when food is over-salted? It tastes horrible. No matter how good our intentions might be, if we come on too strong, we do more harm than good.

People are much more likely to turn to Jesus if they first experience his love from us, and his peace in how we treat them, and his joy in the way we live our lives. They need to discover that Jesus loves them just the way they are, that he is gentle but sincere when inviting them to grow spiritually, and that he can help them turn hardships and troubles into blessings and joys.

Jesus also tells us to be a light that others cannot help but notice -- but not a light that blinds. To flavor the lives of others with the presence of Jesus, we have to let his light shine in us. We have to be so lit up by Christ that others cannot help but notice.

Additionally, Jesus says that we have to be a city. We cannot evangelize alone. A "city" is a group of Christians: a parish, a family, a church organization.

Being Christian means being in community. When our light is joined to the light of others, our collective glow is much more effective in revealing Christ to the world. Why? Because non-believers learn that the love of Christ is real when they see us living in love with each other: unconditionally, generously, with a servant's heart (see Acts 2:42-47).

We are the light of Christ for each other. We are seasoning for each other. Without each other, our light dims, our flavor fades, and we become useless to God's kingdom.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† In what ways have you over-salted someone by trying too hard or too often to evangelize? What were the results? What will you do to rectify this?

† What obstructs the light of Christ within you? What in you needs to change so that the people around you can see him better?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† What clues help us identify people whose lives are lacking the full flavor of Jesus' love?

† How could their lives be seasoned with the love of Jesus that is in you? And in your parish?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time

February 19, 2017

Read:

Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18

Ps 103:1-4,8,10,12-13

1 Corinthians 3:16-23

Matthew 5:38-48



Reflect:

Mercy is the key to understanding this Sunday's Gospel reading. Think of love as the front door to people's hearts. When they close it, mercy is the love that sneaks in through the back door.

In ancient times, if someone gouged another person in the eye, the victim could gather his clan and punish him by wiping out his aggressor's clan. So God gave his people a law that brought them closer to love: If someone hurts your eye, you may do nothing more than the same to him. It was still unloving, but at least it was fair.

When Jesus came onto the scene, he raised the standards: If someone hurts you, don't play fair; give that person love.

When people sin against us, they don't understand that they're closing their hearts to God and his love. But if we give them love, we give them God through a back door.

This does not mean we are to remain in harm's way. But if we continue to give them love -- even if only from afar -- we bring God and his healing into the situation.

If someone steals from you or demands something from you unjustly, you can't stop his greed but you can stop him from sinning against you: Let it go, give it to him. And as an act of generous love, give him more! I know it doesn't feel right, but this is what Jesus says *is* right. Divinely right.

If someone asks you to do a chore for her because she's lazy, prevent it from becoming a sin of cruelty; gladly do what she asks and volunteer to do more.

This plan of Jesus demonstrates, through us, that God's love is superior to everything else. It proves that love conquers evil.

This is what it means to be perfect. Perfection in the Bible means the fullness of love -- complete, unlimited, merciful love.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† Think of a time when God showed you mercy even though you didn't deserve his love. What did it feel like when he gave you his love anyway? How did it change you?

† Who is currently sinning against you? What good deeds can you do simply and easily even before he or she asks for forgiveness?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Describe a time when you did a good deed to someone who caused you difficulties. What kind of impact did your efforts make? If you're not aware of good results yet, how did it help *you* experience God's love?

† How can stopping an abuse be done as an act of love?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

8th Sunday in Ordinary Time

February 26, 2017

Read:

Isaiah 49:14-15

Psalm 62:2-3,6-9

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

Matthew 6:24-34



Reflect:

This Sunday's Gospel reading comes from the part of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus gives advice on how to live in the holiness that he has been teaching and modeling. Interestingly, it follows the same guidelines that Jesus set forth in the "Our Father" prayer, starting with "give us this day our daily bread". Both the prayer and the sermon focus our attention on trusting God for our daily needs.

In every temptation, in every challenge, and in every difficulty, either we choose to trust God or else we trust our limited understanding of the situation and choose the ways of the world. We cannot do both at the same time, although we might fool ourselves into believing that we can keep one foot in heaven while the other foot walks the paths of the world. (Try picturing that!)

The word "mammon" comes from the Aramaic word for "wealth" or "property." It's been said that someone once prayed, "Give us this day our daily bread" and God replied, "You already have your bread and other people's bread, too." What do we have in storage that someone else needs? We store up for the future while others barely survive as they lack what we have in abundance.

It feels dangerous to give away what we've stored up; someday we might need it more than they do! (This is why most Catholics feel so uncomfortable when asked to give generously to the parish and to other charities.)

If that's our thinking, we're not trusting God to take care of us. We are living under the assumption that he won't be as generous with us as we are with others. That's why Jesus went on to say, "You worry too

much!" We should focus not on what worries us but on how good God is.

Jesus said, "God loves you so much, he will take care of you! If you seek first God's kingdom and handle daily life God's way, you'll have everything you need."

Worry is a sin when it takes our eyes off of Jesus. Worry is evil when it restrains us from giving to others what Jesus wants to give them through us.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† In what ways do you "straddle the fence"? What are some of the compromises you make with the world instead of imitating Christ completely?

† What are your favorite possessions? If you know someone who could benefit from them, could you part with them?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Describe a time when you gave away something that was hard to give? What did you learn from it?

† Why is this part of the Sermon on the Mount so difficult to accept and live?

Comments/Prayer Requests: