

Reflection for the Fifth Sunday of the Church's Year

Imagine yourself in the crowd that Jesus is addressing in his sermon on the mount. You have recently come to hear of this new rabbi who teaches in synagogues and heals “*every disease and every affliction among the people.*” Together with “*great crowds from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judaea, and from beyond the Jordan*”¹ you have sought him out. Perhaps you have come in search of healing. You may have already spent several days in his company and followed him from place to place. Now he leads you and others up a hillside and then turns to address you.

Jesus starts with some general remarks aimed at no-one in particular, beginning with the words “*blessed are those.....*” He then speaks directly, and personally, to you and everyone else in the crowds replacing the words “*blessed are those....*” with the more personal “*blessed are you....*” Perhaps you were startled when you heard him suggest that continued association with him might be a dangerous business because you heard him say, “*blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*”² How do you feel now? Are you ready to be reviled and persecuted?

Jesus then goes on to speak to you about a mission which you must accomplish, and this is where today's gospel picks up from last weekend. “*You are the salt of the earth*”, says Jesus, and salt is there to improve and enhance the world. “*You are the light of the world*” and light is there to shine out brightly and “*give light to all in the house*” and you must “*let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*” Perhaps you and others in the crowd are not quite ready for such onerous responsibilities and came along more for the miracles than the mission. Jesus underlines his mission to you with a warning that “*if salt has lost its taste...it is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.*” He speaks too of how light cannot be hidden and “*is not to be put under a basket.*” How do you feel now? Having followed Jesus for some days because you have seen the healing miracles he has worked, are you now ready to become more deeply involved, to become an ambassador for Jesus, to be “*the salt of the earth*” and “*the light of the world*” as well as to be reviled and persecuted?

Addressing the crowds who have followed him Jesus seeks to mould them into effective disciples. In describing them as “*the salt of the earth*” and “*the light of the world*” he is setting the bar high on what he expects of them, but he is also expressing tremendous confidence in them. As we hear his words with those early followers let us ask ourselves - are we ready in our own age to embrace this mission to heed Jesus' call to be salt and light.

¹ Matt 4: 23, 25

² Matt 5: 11-12