

## 5th Sunday Ordinary Time, Year A

The Gospel last Sunday was the beatitudes in which Jesus gives us an intimate insight into the way in which he relates to God and so to us. He is inviting us to share these qualities of heart with him. Today the readings continue to describe what we will be like if we follow Jesus as his disciples.

The Responsorial Psalm chosen for today (Psalm 112 in the Hebrew psalter) is meant to be read in relation to the psalm which precedes it in which we are given a description of the qualities that are typical of God. Today's psalm asserts that a good person shares in God's compassion. A good person is one who does not hold back from being committed to the truth, to justice and to people, in love. A good person is one who is true to his or her word, who cares enough to take a stand and is not forever holding back in case things don't work out, in case things change for the worse, in case I feel differently tomorrow, in case things get too difficult. Commitment is hard in our world and we have to be very discerning, but there is no journeying without commitment, and, unless our trust is being so abused as to be really destructive, there is character in holding to our word when the going is hard. The Psalmist says that the heart of a good person is secure because his or her trust is in the Lord. Fear comes but it does not make us waver from showing to others the generosity, mercy and justice of God.

The First Reading, to which this psalm is a response, is one of the most beautiful passages of the Old Testament. Life can leave us in darkness, with our hearts broken and wounded. Using Moses as a model, the prophet tells us to reach out in love towards others: 'Then will your light shine like the dawn and your wound be quickly healed over'. Throughout the Old and New Testament we are constantly being told that the value of our life is measured by our loving. It is important to remember that we can love only as we are. We must not give in to the expectations that others place unfairly upon us. If they want us to love more than we can or in a way that forces us to behave in a way that does not fit with who we are, we have to recognise that this is unfair. You recall Tolstoy's description of a young boy: 'He was nine years old. He was a child. But he knew his own soul and cherished it. He guarded it as the eyelid guards the eye'. Like that child, we have to know our own soul and treasure it.

It is even more common for us to put unfair expectations on ourselves. We expect ourselves to love the way we used to love, without considering the hurts we have received or the changes that life has brought. We keep replaying the tapes of childhood and trying to live up to expectations of parents or teachers which were sometimes sensitive, but sometimes came from their inability to appreciate the unique quality of our temperament. We put ourselves down and become confused, angry and bewildered. God will never put us down. Jesus' Spirit is gracing us to love where and as we are. If our heart is broken, we can love with a broken heart. If our heart is pierced, so was the heart of Jesus and he kept loving on the cross even though he was unable to reach out physically and embrace those who were suffering near him. This is the point of the Second Reading: the Jesus preached by Paul is the crucified Christ.

We must stop putting pressure on those near us to be different. Neither are we expected to do violence to ourselves and try to force ourselves to accept behaviour that offends us. We are to be honest with each other, but always humble, always aware that we could be wrong and always respectful of the mystery of the other person. If I need to change, the best help you can

give me is to love me. Please God the day will come when I recognise your love and heed your words. Then your truth may assist me to change. I am not pretending that any of this is easy. Relationships can be a bit like being in the open sea at the mercy of tides and winds over which we have little or no control. And so Jesus takes us back to the heart. Wherever you are now and whatever you have done, you, now, are capable of loving. Offer that love even if it breaks your heart. His last words were that we love others as he loves them.

And so we come to the Gospel. To be disciples of Jesus is to share his mission from God. We are to be 'salt' to the earth, giving it taste, preserving it, consecrating it to God. Jesus warns us that we must be vigilant to preserve close communion with him. Otherwise we will be rendered useless, like salt that has lost its taste. Jesus' disciples are to be 'the light of the world'. Our lives are to be sacraments of God drawing all who witness our lives and good deeds to give thanks and praise to God. Jesus speaks of God as our Father, for his disciples share Jesus' intimacy with God. We are Jesus' brothers and sisters, truly 'blessed', sharing in his divine communion.

Jesus' words about us being the light of the world are echoed by Paul when he writes to the Christians of Philippi and exhorts them to be 'children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world'(Philippians 2:15). Likewise Peter: 'Conduct yourselves honourably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honourable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge'(1Peter 2:12). Jesus is also warning us against the subtle temptation to do good works for God, while at the same time siphoning off some of the glory for ourselves. There is no surer way of putting a barrier between ourselves and grace, for God loves us too much to allow us to twist grace in this way. The purer we are, the more God can let his light shine through us. That is the kind of light the world needs to see.

The Eucharist is a prayer of thanksgiving. Let us thank God for all those people who now are teaching us how to love better, and let us commit ourselves more deeply to love as best we may, knowing that love has no purpose other than itself. In the unfolding of the mystery of love we find God and so we find ourselves and others as they truly are. There is no other way.