

The Fifth Week in Ordinary Time
February 5, 2017

This week the Sermon on the Mount continues and Jesus moved on to describe what it means to be a true disciple. As he does so, we see that He's far less concerned with a disciple following a list of rules and regulations than he is about what constitutes the essence of discipleship.

Of course, being unconcerned with rules and regulations doesn't mean that Jesus doesn't care about our actions; instead He goes to the essence of discipleship which is to be the salt of the earth and to be the light of the world.

This requires from us the very deepest level of commitment; it concerns the whole of our being. To be Salt and Light, we consecrate our whole lives to God, to devote our entire selves to him.

It should always be in the back of our minds what God wants, and what he thinks, and what he might want us to do or say, and how great his love is.

When we're able to do that, then we have accomplished Christ's instruction to "pray without ceasing".

When I was in the seminary taking a class on pastoral counselling, one of the first lessons learned was that any one engaged in counseling needs to be very careful about the words they use.

Because in every encounter with a person the counsellor either builds the person up or breaks them down. In other words, a counsellor never has zero effect. You either help or hinder the person you are talking with. It's impossible to be neutral.

It's the same thing for a Christian disciple — we either help or hinder every person we encounter to see the face of Christ.

We never have zero effect; in everything we say or do we either build up or breakdown, we either reveal the love of God to the world or we obscure God's love.

Hopefully, most of the people around us know we're Catholics. When they see us they get their opinion of what a Catholic is.

And maybe they only know one thing, that Catholics are strict followers of the Gospel and have firm views about morality and are pretty much dedicated to their faith.

But many people around us probably don't know much about what being a follower of Christ really means. So when they look at us they see what a disciple says and does and then they make a judgment about Christ according to what they see and hear from us.

Sadly, we often fail in this regard, all of us. All too often we try to keep our discipleship at a superficial level. We want to fit in with the crowd and go with the flow.

We want to follow Christ but not in a deeply radical way.

There's a story told of Michelangelo entering his studio where some his students were working on their assignments. Carefully he went round the room and examined the canvases of each of his pupils.

A few he cautiously complimented. He advised one or two to make sure they kept their day jobs. Finally he came to his star student. But the man was working on a small canvas. Michelangelo took up a brush and across the picture, he wrote the Latin word "amplius" which means "larger."

Michelangelo felt his pupil was playing it too safe. He wasn't working up to capacity. He wanted him to start all over again. The pupil was angry and disappointed but most of all he wanted to show his master what he could do; so he went on to paint an absolute masterpiece.

Psychologists tell us that we leave this world with sizeable portions of our brains woefully undeveloped. I think we can safely say that this is even truer of our spirits.

Spiritually we're capable of being so much more effective and interesting Christians than we are at any given moment.

Jesus doesn't want His disciples to be just good and kind Mass-goers who aren't going to cause trouble for anyone. He wants us to be bold and imaginative and dynamic.

That's what He means when He tells us He wants us to be the salt of the earth.

He doesn't want us to hide behind our prayer books in fear like the disciples in the upper room before Pentecost. He wants us to use the gifts of the Holy Spirit so we can light up the world with our lives.

This is what Pope Francis meant when he told the young people at World Youth day: "**Stir things up**, cause confounding, but do not diminish faith in Jesus Christ."

And remember the last words of Jesus recorded at the end of Matthew's Gospel?

"Go, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And know that I am with you always, even to the end of time."

These words of Pope Francis and Jesus are addressed to all of us here today. They indicate what all authentic Disciples of Christ are commissioned to do.

But at times we may feel like St. Paul did when he said in our second reading that he came among the Corinthians in fear and trembling. He knew that he could not do much even with all his human knowledge so he placed himself entirely in the hands of God.

In other words, we need to let go of our fears and doubts so that in faith and trust we can let God work in us to achieve so much more that we can ever ask or imagine.

That's what it means to be salt and light, constantly turning to God for guidance in all the things we say and all we do so that in time we begin to think and speak and act like Christ himself.