



Fifth Sunday of the Year

Homily

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Archbishop of Perth**

**Sunday 9 February 2020
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

Many of you here this morning might remember that last Sunday we celebrated the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. It is unusual for a feast day to take the place of a normal Sunday celebration and it is an indication of just how important the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord is in our Catholic faith.

At the heart of last week's liturgy was the theme of Jesus as the light which dispels the darkness in people's lives. We heard again the words of the prophet Simeon who spoke of Jesus as the light which enlightens all people. This prayer of Simeon connects with today's gospel in which Jesus speaks of us, his disciples, as the light of the world. The relationship between Jesus and us, his disciples, becomes very clear. It is a relationship which Jesus explains more fully when he appears to the disciples after his resurrection and says to them: *As the Father sent me so I now send you.* In the mystery of the death of Jesus, in resurrection from the dead and his return to his Father in heaven we do not celebrate the absence of Jesus from our world. Rather we celebrate his new and vital presence in our world through the gift of his Holy Spirit. With the coming of the Holy Spirit on the first disciples of Jesus at Pentecost the Church was born. Filled with the power of the Holy Spirit the first Christian community was able to respond to the command of Jesus to go out into the world and baptise all people in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. This is the Church to which we belong and this is the mission in which we all have a share because of our baptism when we first received the grace and power of the Holy Spirit.

The power of the Holy Spirit does more, of course, than simply energise us for the work of proclaiming the gospel. The Holy Spirit creates such a profound communion between Jesus and each one of us that it is through us as the people of the Church that Jesus continues to be present and active in our world, in our society, in our families, as our shepherd, as our saviour, as our life. This is why Saint Paul will speak of the Church as the body of Christ and why we in our Catholic tradition take this very seriously. It is because we are united so closely with Christ that we can truly claim, in spite of the failures and limitations of so many individual Christians, that the Church is holy. And it is holy, of course, not because we are holy but because Christ is holy.



When Jesus therefore says in today's gospel that we, his disciples, are the salt of the earth and the light of the world he is really reminding us that we are his disciples. Our privilege and our vocation is to allow ourselves to be so united to him that what was true of him during his life on earth becomes true of us during our life on earth.

What does it mean for us as members of the Church to be together the ongoing presence of Christ in our world? It means that we try to see with the eyes of Christ, listen with the ears of Christ, speak with the voice of Christ and act and love with the heart of Christ. It means, as the first reading today indicates, that we should share our bread with the hungry and shelter the homeless poor; that we should clothe those who have no clothes and live in harmony and reconciliation with our families; that we should do away with the clenched fist and the wicked word. In other words it means that our discipleship of Jesus should not just be about what we believe - and it should certainly be that - but also and equally about how we act. It is only when we are genuinely trying our very best to make sure that our high-sounding words are matched by our generosity of action that we can claim to be the disciples of Jesus which we are already in virtue of our baptism.

A couple of weeks ago here in the Cathedral, I summed up my homily by quoting from a saying of Saint Teresa of Avila. I want to do so again this morning as I believe that it is very helpful for us to reflect on what Saint Teresa's words would mean for us if we tried to live them out in practice:

Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands no feet on earth but yours
Yours are the eyes with which he looks with compassion on this world,
Yours are the sheet with which he walks to do good
Yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body

This is what it means for us to be the salt of the earth and the light for the world. This is the beauty and the challenge and the privilege of our vocation as disciples of Jesus gathered together in his Church. Today let us give thanks for this wonderful vocation and let us commit ourselves once again to following Jesus our Way, our Truth, and our Life.