

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time: Light of the World, Salt of the Earth

A while back I saw a bleak play called *Avenue Q*. I thought it would be good because it had been the number one musical and because it was unique. It used puppets. Well, it turned out to be a play for adults hiding behind children's games and puppets. Its main theme was "It is rotten to be me," only it didn't use the word *rotten*. It used a word that has come into modern parlance but which has obscene origins.

The play turned out to be one of those ultra-dark comedies where people just laugh at how things keep getting worse. It concludes with a step over pessimism by saying that even the worst things are only for a while.

The play reflected that same pessimism that prevailed in so much of existential philosophy. Sartre, Ionesco, and many others focused in on life, and concluded that there was no hope for the world. For them existence was a black hole. Suicide was the only reasonable escape.

It is to these people who live in darkness that Christ sends us. "You are the Light of the world," we heard in today's Gospel. We are the world's hope. We carry within us the joy of Jesus, the unsurpassable wisdom of the Lord.

There is an old song we used to use on Teen retreats: "I've got the joy, joy, joy of the Lord in my heart." Well, we do. We have the Joy of Jesus Christ. The joy of his Presence makes our lives worthwhile. We don't claim, "It's rotten to be me," instead we say, "It is wonderful to be me. I am loved and I am capable of loving. It is wonderful being a Christian. I carry Christ within me and I can provide an experience of his presence, his life to those around me. I, we, are the Light of the World.

One of the wonderful blessings of the priesthood is the experience that I and other priests have with you when you are in crisis. We are called in during your worst times, but there's your Mom or Dad, or your husband or wife, or your child or a friend, saying, "I'm going to be OK. I may not live, but I am still going to be OK." Our faith enlightens each other.

Recently I officiated at a funeral for a family who lost their second sibling to cancer within six months. Their brother died first. Six months later their sister died. Both were relatively young. In the middle of their grief and pain, this family proclaimed their faith in Jesus Christ. They were convinced that their sister will join their brother in that place where there is no more pain, suffering or death. At the same time, they did not regret their siblings' lives. They celebrate them because each brought so much love to the world. Instead of being pessimistic in the middle of this turmoil, this family was full of faith, and life, and love, and light. *We are the Light of the World.*

We are also the *Salt of the Earth*. In these days of football playoffs, many of us have stocked up on snacks. Now just about everything on the junk food pyramid needs salt. Popcorn without salt, fritos without salt, potato chips without salt, french

fries without salt and many other snacks would be rather tasteless. Think of what these foods are—mostly just greased up potatoes or corn. Salt tends to make ordinary things extraordinary.

I read a story a while ago about a 13 year who made the ordinary extraordinary and was salt in the earth. The boy was a super bicycle racer. He had been racing bicycles since he was 8. When he was not racing bicycles, he spent his spare time working on his bike, and building new bikes from scraps. By the time he was twelve he had three or four bicycles. His mother told him there were children at a nearby home for needy children who didn't have bikes; so one day he brought two of his bikes over there. He was deeply moved when he saw the expressions on the boys' faces he gave the bikes to. He decided that he would make 18 more bikes for the rest of the children in the home. He used all his allowance, did side jobs, and combed the city for discarded bicycle parts. For Christmas he delivered eighteen bicycles to the home. Well, the papers got hold of this and interviewed him. The boy responded. "It was no big deal. It was just something I could do to make other kids happy."

His generosity is the salt of faith. He used his skills to demonstrate God's goodness in the world. His generosity, like salt, made ordinary things extraordinary.

When we live out faith, the humdrum occurrence of everyday life which so bothered those people fed up with life, now become extraordinary ways of approaching God. St. Theresa of Liseaux would say there is nothing too little that we could do for the Lord. The little things we do for people give meaning and purpose to life. We have the ability to put flavor into existence. We are called to be the salt of the earth.

How can we do this? How can we live faith lives wherever we are? Well, we have to keep in contact with God. We have to pray daily as well as join the scriptural and sacramental worship of the community. We have to look for the little ways that we can be kind to others. So many times people will look at the goodness of a neighbor, or a parent or child and say, "He did not do extraordinary things. He did ordinary things in an extraordinary way. His actions were a prayer. He was the salt of the earth.

We are the salt of the earth. We are the light of the world. We have been called to make the Lord present. Today we pray for the strength to live our faith.