

TALK PUY DE SERRE 9th February 2020

Matthew 5: 13-20

1 Corinthians 2: 1-12

Psalm 112

If I ask **you** what you remember of the winter of 1973 to 74, what would be your response? I suspect what you'll most remember will be the 3 day week. This resulted from the oil-producing countries reducing production; British miners beginning an overtime ban; and the Government declaring a State of Emergency. This led to severe restrictions in the permitted use of energy in all its forms, including the use of electricity by individuals, local authorities and industry.

At the time I was responsible for organising adult education classes and youth clubs on a couple of housing estates in South Leeds and the restrictions, coming in winter, meant most evening classes and youth clubs had to be cancelled. Two main reasons; we could use only minimal lighting in our buildings, and the reduction in street lighting meant people didn't feel safe going out at night. It brought home to all of us, the importance of light in every aspect of life, and the limitations imposed by its absence.

In this morning's passage from Matthew we hear our Lord asking us to share in his light and his ministry, by becoming the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Notice, too, that these qualities are to be for everyone; not just for Jews, for members of the Church; or any other selective group. The Gospel of Christ is all-inclusive!

"You are the salt of the earth". In the time of Jesus, salt was a very precious commodity. It was sometimes used to pay Roman soldiers, indeed the word 'salary' comes from salt being used as wages. The Romans felt salt was the purest of items, as it was formed by two pure things, the sun and the sea. The very purity of salt stops food going bad - acting as a cleansing agent which can prevent corruption.

So the Christian is being asked to be an example of Christ-like living; to work to prevent evil, and to stop society from going bad. If that sounds a little negative, we should also recall that salt gives taste to food; it brings out the flavour in food to

which it is added. So we are called to reveal the joy of living - to show that life has flavour, and to stop so much corrupt, insipid living - to bring out the best in others with the good news of the truth, mercy and love of God.

However, just as the impure salt of the Dead Sea could lose its distinctive flavour when the sodium chloride dissolved, so there is always a danger that the believer's distinctiveness and commitment may become watered down.

'You are the light of the world'. In the ancient world, to keep a light burning somewhere was often of the utmost importance. If your light went out, you had to go and borrow another from someone. Of course, all lights have to receive their light from somewhere, and Christians believe we receive our light from Jesus. So any light we're able to give out is a reflected light.

Light is to be seen, not hidden. We cannot keep our faith a secret, but must share it with others. There is so much darkness, and so many dark places, that can overcome individuals, that we are called on to bring Christ's light to the world around us, so others can find their way to him and see each other more clearly.

Jesus calls us, saying, 'Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works, and give glory to your Father in heaven'. We can so easily hide our light; by simply going along with the crowd, keeping quiet when we know we should speak, or ignoring the needs of others. Christians should be beacons of truth, enabling others to be enlightened.

The scribes and Pharisees felt they scrupulously followed the tenets of God's laws. They were very good at explaining to others how God wanted them to live, but this is insufficient; the law is fulfilled only when the whole quality of our own life reflects the character of God. It's of limited good to study the Scriptures and to tell others about their message, if we are not living examples of Christ-like living.

No-one can earn a place in heaven; it's God's free gift, to the deserving and undeserving alike. But it's only possible when we have a loving relationship with the God who offers his love freely. However, just as lamplight can be masked by a cover,

so a Christian's impact on those around him, or he,r can be overshadowed by other preoccupations. The whole quality of our life should reflect the character of God.

The mindset and lifestyle of true disciples should bring the light of Christ to bear on every aspect of human life. God judges our hearts as well as our deeds, for its in our hearts that true allegiance is found. We need to be as concerned about the attitudes we have which people don't see, as we are about our actions which are seen by everyone.

God, of course, sees everything. We are now in the year 2020, what more appropriate time can there be for us to perfect the vision of others, by reacting to the light of Christ by faithfully reflecting it to all those we meet.

(Let's pray)

Let the healing grace of your love, Lord, so transform us that we may play our part in changing the world - from a place of corruption, suffering and death to a realm of infinite light, joy and love. Make us so obedient to your Spirit that our lives bear witness to your unfailing presence, and reflect your light to all who find themselves in dark places.

Amen