

Chaplain's Bulletin February 5, 2023



Dear Folks,

In our Gospel this Sunday Jesus says, “You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot (Matthew 5:13).” If we take this seriously, it should disturb us. If we can read Jesus’ words and be unaffected, something is very, very wrong.

There has been conversation about lower church attendance, and we are hearing about churches closing in our diocese (and I’m quite sure there will be more). Other churches have been getting clustered and Mass schedules have been getting reduced.

Do people see that the Church is making a difference? If they don’t see that it matters, it won’t take much for them to leave. We can talk about how so many stopped because of the Covid lock downs, and we can talk for years about what the bishops should have done differently, but it has really only exposed how thin and fragile so many people’s motivation was. There are some who do not come because of legitimate concerns about how their health is. Prudence is a virtue, and it is good to stay safe. We don’t want people coming to church with the flu either. But when people go to other gatherings but do not come to Mass every Sunday, or they decide they like it better watching Mass on TV in their pajamas with their hot chocolate, what does that say about how we have taught the meaning, the power, and the value of the Mass? I’m not saying this to blame them, but rather ask how good a job have we been doing conveying why the Mass matters, why it should be a priority.

We are called by Jesus to transform the world by the power of the Gospel. The Gospel is the most powerful transformative message in the universe. If we truly answer that call, the Church will flourish, even in the harshest of environments. The early Church did, and they had much less to work with than we did.

How salty and shiny should we be? What is the necessary level? How much do we need to do? The short answer is “I don’t know.” If we are doing what we are supposed to be doing, would we not be drawing in more people than we are losing? Would we not be transforming the world? Each of us has a role, and God knows what we are capable of. The story of the widow’s mite (Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4) teaches us if we can only do a teeny bit, but do it with all our hearts, it is huge in God’ eyes. We need to let go of the idea that we are helpless, but also that we cannot do it alone. God calls us to work together.

I suggest the future of the Catholic Church in America will be determined by how salty and shiny we choose to be. How to do that is a big question. I plan to spend the rest of my life working on it. I’ fond of thinking that what I have been teaching has helped somewhat in that direction.

Here are some thoughts moving forward:

- Recognize that parishioners are not customers in the Church but coworkers in mission. How do our approach to Church, our expectations of the Church and our expectations of ourselves reflect that?
- Consider that the way we have been doing Church isn’ getting us where we need to go, so we can’ evaluate our

Church the way we are used to. What we have thought of as doing well may not really be doing well. As someone said recently, “Get used to different.”

- When people want to talk at length about what the Pope or the bishop should be doing about it, or what should have been done differently in the past, it would be useful to redirect the conversation toward how we can better be salt and light.
- This is not about us. It is about drawing people to Jesus. It is God’ work, and He is calling us to cooperate.
- The best-case scenario involves things getting worse before they get better. The New Testament continually calls us to persistence and not getting discouraged. If we are faithful during this time, we can boldly hope for a glorious future.

Blessings,

Fr. Jim