

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle A

5-6 February 2011

Homily – Steven Roth

She is the glue that keeps the family together. He really is the spark in that relationship. These and so many others are examples of how we use everyday objects to try to describe or encapsulate our understanding of another person. Glue, describing how perhaps this mother does her best to ensure the family spends quality time together. A spark, maybe describing this person's personality or energy. Jesus, in this same sense, uses salt when He calls us the salt of the earth. Why salt? From a medical standpoint is Jesus telling us we are the cause of high blood pressure, weight gain or heart attacks? Or is Jesus calling us salt because of the wonderful aspects of salt...think of what salt adds to popcorn! I'm not sure if it's the snow and cold but when I prayed over this gospel, the image that popped into my head was the saltwater of the ocean. Although we complain that the saltwater burns our eyes or that we rush to shower off the saltwater after a swim...let's face it...the ocean would not be the ocean without that wonderfully refreshing and soothing salt water.

So whether it's popcorn, heart attacks or the ocean, we can all agree that salt has power! It changes things and makes an undeniable difference. This is exactly why I think Jesus calls us to be salt of the earth. As believer, we are called to make a difference in the world by feeding the hungry, caring for the homeless, and tending to those in need. He calls us to be honest with others, not to cheat or lie to get ahead, but to be fair and just.

Brothers and sisters, you and I both know this is no easy way of life. At times we get tired and maybe see our colleagues not living a Christian life and getting rewarded for it. They have more money, fancier cars, etc. Imagine what you could buy if you stopped supporting the Church or caring for the poor. At times, maybe you and I do not just think of this, but maybe we actually do stop living our Christian life.

It is then that we lose our flavor, our impact as salt of the earth. Jesus does not mince words but clearly says, in those moments, we are good for nothing and are simply to be trampled underfoot. It is true, when we care only for ourselves; when we don't care about the cost but simply want to get ahead...in those cases, what good are we?

So I suspect we are all, in one way or another, wishing we had more potency, wishing we were the salt we once were. For us, Christ calls us to look to Him for refreshment. Karl Rahner, probably one of the best theologians ever, has a wonderful way of building on our earlier ocean image. He says that the ocean is the vast mystery of God. For believers, we do not stand on the small island of safety, of what we think and know of God, in the midst of this cosmic ocean of mystery. Believers, followers of Jesus, do not merely stand on the shore peering out, wondering what the water is like. For believers, it is not enough to even ask others who have gone into the water what it is like. Rather they venture out into the mystery of the ocean. They allow the water to fully overwhelm them. Here the ocean water covers them, even turns them upside down. But because of this we are changed. We are refreshed by being immersed in God. It is in returning to the Lord that we will find strength to live good and holy lives.

So, being salt of the earth, we may in fact raise people's blood pressure when they see that no cost is too great for us to live a faithful Christian life. We might cause people to feel as though they are having a heart attack when, as salt of the earth, we refuse to condemn others. Then, we as salt of the earth will add completeness to our world and the world of others. We will be the salt on the popcorn that brings flavor and draws people to want more. We have the ability to draw people to Christ!

We indeed are the salt of the earth. May our prayer today be that no matter what choices we have made in life, may we not find ourselves stricken with fear on the shore of the water. This is no Sandy Point polar bear plunge. The water is not cold nor is it frightening. But we will only know that if we ourselves experience it.