

**Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time A - We are the Salt of the World and the light of the World.**  
February 9, 2020

*“Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer, you shall cry for help, and he will say, ‘Here I am’.* (Isaiah 58:9 of the first reading). **“Why Bad Things Happen to Good People.”** It is a question on many peoples’ mind, including mine. Sometimes the question is a cry of despair, an angry shout. I survived cancer 26 years ago. Hit by a stroke that disabled my body but not my spirit. But now a skin disease that drives me insane! Since mid-December, I started having itchy rashes and then blisters that slowly grew on my body. Went to ER four times, getting four different opinions and was prescribed four different antibiotics with side effect of diarrhea. None of these helped. A teledermatology was arranged for end of January but postponed to mid February. In the meantime, the blisters bursted, raw skin exposed and took forever to heal. Monster blisters are forming on my legs and my arms. I suffered from excruciating pain, sleepless nights and motionless days. Meanwhile, my wife did an intensive online research, consulted Dr. Google, what I have is - Bullous Pemphigoid, an autoimmune skin disease. It starts with rashes that further into the formation of blisters. It will recover in due course but may take months to years, mostly affect men over 70 and only 7-14 in a million will have this. Guess I am the chosen one. You may ask why no pain killer? Yes, there is liquid Tyralol Extra strength but the side effects of this may cause rashes, blisters. Don’t want to add oil to fire. Besides, **Jesus was crucified without any pain killer!** The blister sites need cleaning and dressing up with antibiotic ointment twice a day. **Saline water** (0.9 % salt water) is used to clean out and reduce chance of bacteria growth in wounds and surrounding areas.

Salt is very inexpensive nowadays. But in Biblical times salt was rare and considered a very precious commodity. In this Sunday’s gospel story: **“You are the salt of the earth.”** (Matthew 5:13). Jesus used this analogy to let the disciples know he expected something extraordinary from them for the love of God. He placed a high value on them and on what he required of them - just as the first-century culture placed a very high value on salt. He taught his followers to act for God in ways as important and varied as salt was in their world. Being salt to the world means adding flavour to life wherever and whenever possible. It means pursuing meaning in all we do and encounter. It means acting in love with all whom we touch. Salt was often connected with purity in Jesus’ days. The Romans believed that salt was the purest of all things, because it came from pure things: *the sun and the sea*. It was used by the Jews to purify their offerings to God. Even now, saline water (0.9 % salt water) is used medically to clean out and purify areas of wounds. If we modern Christians are to be the salt of the earth, we must accept a pure and high standard in speech, thought, and behaviour - keeping ourselves unspotted by the world's self-centredness. Jesus calls us to be a cleansing presence, constantly witnessing to the good that is found in God and the values of God’s realm. As salt in the world, we can become nurturing agents for those around us - caring, helping, loving, enriching, teaching, and bringing them to Christ. Salt is used for healing, so as salt in the world, we can promote healing through prayer, care and support for the least, the lost, and the lonely. Just like using salt to thaw ice on roads, we too can help melt the iciness of life. Frozen relationships can be melted by applying the warmth of Christian love. We can take that love and wear down the indifference that often overtakes human beings.

One big blister bursted last night and the pain is almost unbearable. **“Why did this happen to me? Why did God allow this to happen? What did I do to deserve this?”** The question is a timeless one. How could a God whom we profess to be all-powerful and all loving allow this? Our faith history contains many examples of people who asked this question. The well-known Book of Job displays the despair and anger of a man on whom disaster has fallen, the deaths of his family, the destruction of flocks and herds, the visitation of illness, the reduction to absolute poverty. Why? Why? Why? Why? But if we replace the Why with these three questions: **“Is God God, or not? Does God love me, or not? Does God want the best for me, or not?”** I asked myself those questions time and time again too, whenever in pain or in despair. And each time I asked, the answers are, **“Yes.”** *Yes, God is God and is in control. Yes, God loves me for he made me his own in baptism. Yes, God wants the best for me and has promised me abundant life.* Why do bad things happen to good people? Surely, Jesus Christ is the good person to

which bad things happened. He is the sinless one put to a painful, disastrous death by a sinful world. And in that death he knows the despair of utter loss, and cries out not *"What have I done to deserve this?"* but *"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."* Bad things do happen in this chaotic world because of the darkness brought about by jealousy, hatred, greed, selfishness and disrespect for human life and the environment. **"You are the light of the world."** We as Christians need to reflect the image of Jesus, the light for us all. The presence of a genuine Christ-like character enriches the world and enables the best in others to come forth. The light of Jesus, who was crucified, raised to new life and to be with us always and in all things as he promised, will enlighten us to the meaning of suffering in our lives and draw us out from the darkness of despair. Yes, I often find myself fearing the worst, forgetting that God will always help me. We will, naturally, pray that suffering be removed from our lives. But can we also, through those prayers, be strengthened enough to be truly open to God's will? Can we trust that, even if we do need to suffer, we will not suffer in vain? Like Mary, in her seven sorrows, was able to endure and persevere because she trusted that God's greater glory would come out of that suffering. She is indeed reflecting the light of Christ for all to see.

And, indeed a new hope for me, **God sends us an angel** - an appointment with a family Doctor specialized in skin care with knowledge of dermatology on Tuesday resulted in a biopsy being done. Results will be known in about 2 weeks. In the meantime, she prescribed topical steroid ointment for all the blisters which she said should stop new ones coming up and heal the existing wounds. The way she listened patiently to my story reflected God's light of love for me and the gentleness she did the biopsy healed my despair like a spoonful of salt. Through her, I felt the presence of God and I knew God has heard my cry for help.