

May my words be spoken and heard in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Who here likes salt? I know Father Steve loves it. You should have seen him the other day in the office when he was talking about adding salt and malt vinegar to chips. It was like he was transformed at the thought of adding these flavours, or at least the chips sounded like they were.

When the family and I were living at St Francis, every Wednesday afternoon while my daughter Victoria was at ballet. Connor and myself would go to the kebab shop and get chips with chicken salt and a side of gravy. Now in my book that makes chips alive in flavour.

But salt on its own isn't very nice. Have you ever gargled salt water? It's not the most pleasant experience. I remember having to do 2-3 times a day after having some teeth taken out when I was 12.

On its own salt isn't the most pleasant thing. But when you add it to food it comes into its own, it transforms food and enhances its flavour.

This brings me to today's Gospel, in particular the first half of the Gospel. Here we have Jesus saying that "you are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world."

These are powerful transformative images that Jesus is using. Just as he does in many other places in the Gospels.

But he leaves it at that - he doesn't explain to us what it means, he doesn't give us instructions, he simply leaves us to place our life experience in these images.

Richard Rohr writes that "deep spiritual transformation happens primarily in the presence of images. They alone can touch the unconscious in one invasive and healing reconfiguration of the soul...one hundred sermons could never have moved you to the new place to which a powerful image can move you."

And this is what I believe today's Gospel is trying to evoke within us.

Jesus is using the images of salt and light to awaken a deep spiritual transformation, to take us to a place within our heart, to bring our true identity in God to the centre of our awareness. And to convince us that this identity of salt and light is more true about who we really are as his disciples

One of the major problems in life is our attachment to our own self-image, who we want to be, or who we think we are both positively and negatively. And we confuse this idea we have of ourselves with our reality in God.

However, Jesus in today's Gospel is telling us quite plainly and simply "you are the salt of the earth, and the light of the world." That is who you are, you just need to believe it, claim it, and live it.

It's as easy as that.

But like I said before, Jesus doesn't explain what it means to be salt and light. We are left to take a journey of self-discovery.

I believe what Jesus is saying in these two powerful images relates to effective discipleship and true righteousness.

I'll come back to these. But first we need to understand what the meaning of salt was in Jesus' time.

Salt was valuable in the ancient world. It was one of the most important necessities of life. Salt was (and still is) used to preserve food, and to alter and enhance the flavour of it. Salt also served as a currency. Our English word salary comes from the Latin word *Sal* which means salt.

This was the result of soldiers in the Roman army being paid a salt allowance, as the commander might ask if a soldier was "worth his salt."

These are only a few ways of how salt was so highly regarded in the ancient biblical world and there are many more. Yet we can see from this snippet, that Jesus calling his disciples salt was a high compliment. It was high praise to be considered as valuable and essential as salt.

But what has this got to with us today and discipleship and righteousness?

Well for Jesus righteousness meant being in right relationship with God our heavenly Father. And I believe that if we as Christians are called to be disciples of Christ our relationship needs to be right with God, both personally and as a Church. So that we can be effective in mission – worth our salt, if you like and the guiding light in the community.

To be in right relationship with the Lord we need to consciously come into a place of being present to the Lord.

And it is through prayer and word that this can happen. For when we pray we enter into conversation with God and into a place that offers deep inner work of spiritual transformation.

Prayer is not simply what we do. It is a way of being. It is the answer to our heart's deepest longings, it is resting in the reality of our being that is, God's love. Prayer allows us the space to come into and be present to Jesus, and it is at the heart of our relationship with God.

But we also need to be able to listen to God when we enter this space of being present to God in prayer.

I think Mother Teresa says it best

"If we really want to pray we must first learn to listen, for in the silence of the heart God speaks."

All the great spiritual writers speak of the importance of silence in prayer. But, for many of us we are frightened of silence, we think it will swallow us up, and we try to fill every moment with noise and activity.

However, silence in prayer is the centre of prayer. It is in the silence that God can speak to us. He can stir us to receive his word afresh and let his love form within us.

I believe through prayer God can show us how to come alive and be the salt and the light for our community.

Today we start prayers for the parish, this is a space where we can come and be intentional about praying for our parish, by being still before God and resting in him

through contemplative prayer. It is a space allowing ourselves to be present and open to God, so that the Spirit of God may continue to awaken us to the gifts and vocation that God has already given us.

As well as to lift up and hold before God the parish and its people. So that we can enhance the flavour and make alive our community here in Ipswich to know and experience God's love.

Let us pray

Loving and gracious God

We give you thanks that you have called each one of us to be the salt and light of the world

Through your grace help us to be transformed and come into this identity so that we may not hide the bright hope you have given us, but tell everyone your love, revealed in Jesus Christ the lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, For ever and ever. Amen