

Christ gave his disciples a complement in today's gospel. He told them they were the salt of the earth and the light of the world! Most of us would be happy to be described like that. And when God the Father looks down on his people gathered here in this church, he means that complement for us too and for the lives we lead. But that complement is also a challenge, because he also said that we should make sure that our deeds are clearly seen.

He wants our deeds to be seen, the deeds of Christians, the deeds of love, the deeds of caring. There should be evidence of the fact that there are followers of Christ still alive and active in today's world.

He doesn't want us to stand out individually and take credit, but he does want the evidence of what we do to be there for others who may be looking for hope in this world. We can be the Christians to provide it, to show God's glory.

To do this, we have to trust God, give up some time, some effort, perhaps even some treasure that we think we may need for ourselves, and turn it over to God's work.

God's love is the light that is shining, but like Father Michael mentioned last week, we are the lanterns that show that light to the world, keeping our glass clean and bright, not hiding the light under a bushel.

So what's the best way to get started since today's gospel calls each and every one of us to get involved?

Start with holy communion, the Eucharist. With Christ a part of us, with him invited into our lives and given a chance to direct our life, we will make the right beginning.

Then spend some time in prayer, alone with Jesus who is now part of us and through Him ask his Father to share his plan for us. We may have to pray for a while, and listen for a while until God feels we understand the gifts he has given us and we are ready for what He has in mind for us. After that look for a place to begin to help, and ask for the Holy Spirit to kindle your light so that it will shine forth.

Too many of us just try to help in any old way. We show up somewhere and say, here I am, use me. And that is good, and in an emergency it may be necessary, but often that kind of enthusiasm fades if it is not directed by God.

I see this at the Sheridan Villa where I am the chaplain. Some people come to help, and they are very useful in a practical way, but if ministering to the elderly is not their gift then they typically drift away after a few weeks. I don't get disappointed at them, I just pray that they don't give up helping because their first experience wasn't a completely positive or fulfilling one.

I think God wants more than just willingness from us. He wants our involvement and to use best the specific gifts he gave us. He wants the candle to fit the lamp.

Many of you have found your niche and contribute to the community now, but each of us has gifts to help in some ways where we would be no help in other ways, different candles fit different lanterns better.

Remember, no one looks at the light itself, they look at the things the light shines on. Likewise with us, people should know that good things have happened without having to look at us, the ones who helped God make them happen.

Isaiah said in today's reading, "Our light will shine if we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, satisfy the needs of the afflicted" and the Psalm says the Lord will be a light for us "if we deal generously and lend." The letter of James says "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world."

It is very important to reflect on this in today's cost-cutting world. Common wisdom says, don't mix religion and politics! But the problem is that doesn't mean you shouldn't mix religion and real life! Our faith should guide all our decisions as we live from day to day.

I'm not going to be political, it's not my place. Whether you believe in government involvement and state sponsored social services or whether you believe that social support must come from the community and individuals outside the government structure, it doesn't really matter, as long as we understand that we all, individually, have a responsibility to our community to contribute our time, our effort and our money to help others who need it, and to help provide those services we need for ourselves and our children.

We are called as Christians to pay attention to where the needs are and to ensure they are addressed, no matter how they are dealt with by the government. We are called to study what each change in the laws and the taxes means and where needed, it is up to us to pick up the slack.

The last two generations have grown up with more and more responsibility for care being pooled under government agencies. This means that we as individuals have separated ourselves from helping directly, we have gotten out of the habit of getting involved, and society has helped us become more and more self-centred, saying "someone else will do it!"

We have been pulling the bushel basket over our own heads so that we can see the light inside for our own use, but we don't share it with anyone else. We can't do that anymore because Christ is calling us to get personally and publicly involved. Take the basket off, look around and let your light shine and let your salt be shared and tasted by others.

It's time and effort too, not just money, in fact that is better than money really! There are enough people living in St. Mary's Star of the Sea parish that even if only those of us who come to mass each week gave one hour a month it would be the equivalent of 5 people working fulltime for the whole year, 1 hour a week would be like 20 people working. One hour out of the 168 hours that God gives us each week.

That's what one hour a month or a week could turn into if you could organize it. It wouldn't

easy but very little that is worthwhile is easy. Imagine what we could do!

It's RRSP season, that time of year, and if we look at the money that many of us are preparing to bury away for twenty or more years to secure a future we can't even guess at, can we trust God, that if we give up some of what we are saving away for later, to let His light shine brighter now, today, then if we have to call him for help in our turn, He will answer!

God has promised us this again and again, but our own worldly wisdom gets in the way when we try to protect and guarantee all our own needs first instead of admitting our lives are always in God's hands anyway.

So, we can take our Lord's complement to us to heart, and be the salt of the earth that Jesus knows we are, trust him, respond to his call and share our salt with others. And then we can let all the world see our light shining, from the tallest lampstands, until we've banished all the darkness.

- Deacon Steve