

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, A – February 5, 2017 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 5pm Sat. Vigil, 8:30am Sunday Masses – 725 words

The Church teaches us that at the moment of conception, the human soul is created directly and immediately by God; even in those situations where men and women have “played God” and manipulated new life into existence (for example, in a laboratory), yet the Lord is still there to create the soul in that instant. Since the soul is our life principle – what makes us and keeps us alive – that means that each and every one of us was willed by God to be here at this time. We are all part of his plan, even if in this life we may never understand fully or even at all how we fit into the big picture.

The gospel this week helps us to see ourselves as protagonists in God’s master plan. The Lord addresses us directly saying, “You are the salt of the earth.... You are the light of the world”. The seasoning of food and the lighting of spaces are not easy things to do right. It takes skill to learn the correct amount of salt to put on food such that it is neither insipid nor overbearing. It takes a certain aesthetic eye and technical know-how to get the lighting in a room balanced perfectly. But the Lord is certainly a master chef and a most skillful technician; the gospel teaches us that he has done all things well.¹

If we live out our call, then, we contribute to the overall “seasoning” of the world, so to speak – that is, we make it a more palatable place to be. If we live out our call, we produce a light that, in our own measure and starting in our own lives, helps to drive out the darkness of sin from the world. And this has nothing to do with being extroverted: we all know people who “light up the room” or who have a “spicy personality”; no, even we more introverted types have a contribution to make. In short, it means allowing the Lord to work through us and the gifts that he has given us.

A simple prayer illustrates this point well; it is one that is found in many classic prayer books, and one that I think we would all do well to say on a daily basis, especially before beginning our daily routine. It goes like this: “Direct, O Lord, we beseech you, all our actions by your holy inspirations, and carry them on by your gracious assistance, that every prayer and work of ours may begin always from you, and by you be happily ended. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.” (If you’d like to have a copy of that prayer, I remind you that my homilies are all posted on the Cathedral web site and you can download it from there.)

The Lord is the chef; he is the technician! This gospel is not about our skill and much less about our personality type, but about our opening our hearts to God in a deeper relationship each day so that he may more perfectly bring his plans to fruition in and through us. One of the psalms proclaims, “If the Lord does not build the house, in vain do its builders labor”;² we could pass each day staying very busy doing good things, but if we were not doing God’s will, we might in fact be over-salting the world and producing a garish sort of light! Christ invites us, then, to enter into a greater intimacy with him – and to trust that he will do all things well.

Each one of us is here because God directly willed it. I think we need to hear that more and more today, as the world seemingly gets crazier and more confused. How are we part of the overall seasoning mix and lighting arrangement? We probably will not understand in this life – but we will in the next. In order to get there, we need to work with the Lord now, on an intimate level, all the days of our lives. And so I come back to that prayer: “Direct, O Lord, we beseech you, all our actions by your holy inspirations, and carry them on by your gracious assistance, that every prayer and work of ours may begin always from you, and by you be happily ended. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

¹ Cf. Mark 7:37.

² Psalm 127:1.