

Homily for the 5th Sunday of OT, Year A 2017 (Mt 5:13-16)

After proclaiming the Beatitudes, Our Lord declares that to accept and practice them is to be the salt of the earth, that is, to be a person of faith who offers vitality and preservation to continue the saving mission of Christ and to be the light of the world, that is, to be a person of faith who allows the radiance and joy of Christ to shine forth in the darkness of human existence.

Upon reflecting and praying with the Beatitudes, I was struck how my prayer lead me to ponder how the beatitude of “blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” has helped me to see how the light of Christ is shining in my life as I continue to mourn the loss of my cousin Daniel.

My cousin experienced a lot of personal and spiritual darkness in his life: he experienced divorce and family breakup at a young age, he struggled with substance abuse, he endured many years of mental illness and he died under very tragic circumstances last fall. Too often we can have a tendency to summarize a person’s life by

simply highlighting what went wrong and how they suffered. To ignore these aspects of my cousin's life would be to belittle the trials he endured but I also know that the light of Christ shone through his life.

Now Daniel might not be the kind of person you would immediately think of as a beacon of Christ's light (or at least I am fairly sure he would have said this was so)! He was baptized as a baby and received his First Holy Communion but going to Mass and growing in his understanding and practice of the Catholic faith were not major features of his life.

We had countless conversations over the years about the existence of God, the problem of good and evil, questions concerning morality, the realities of judgement, hell, purgatory and heaven and countless other theological and philosophical discussions, many of which left me with some questions to ponder and challenged to my own practice and understanding of the Catholic faith. In the final

months of his life, I believe that he had come to accept and believe that God was real and that God loved him.

I will never forget him sending me a YouTube video of a popular Christian praise and worship song that had been remixed to reggae beats. Danny knew I love reggae and dub music, though I did not have the heart to tell him I quite loathed the overly saccharine and sentimental song he sent, but the fact that he thought to send it to me because he thought it would bring me some joy was but one example of how the light of Christ shone through in his life.

My cousin had a sensitive soul and desire to do good to others that humbled me, as I do not always have the same spontaneity and gentle spirit that readily looks to help those in crisis or looks to offer someone a small gesture of kindness that would put a smile on their face. But that was the kind of person my cousin strived to be and is but one instance that I can now reflect back upon to see how Jesus was shining forth in Danny's life, though I do not think Danny always realized that it was Jesus that he was bringing to others.

It is in these memories that I now cherish that has helped me to work towards accepting and being at peace with the fact that I was not able to be with my cousin at the moment of his death. As a priest and as a cousin, I hoped that I could have the opportunity to hear my cousin's confession and give him the last rites of the Church before he died. But this did not happen, I could not give him the greatest gift I can give as a priest. Yet I have found that the light of Christ still shines through the darkness of his passing because as I mourn him I know that I can continue to pray for him.

I can continue to ask God to show Danny mercy every time I offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and pause for a moment to pray for him when we pray for all those who have died. The love I have for my cousin is not limited to the physical and spiritual confines of this life; they extend beyond time, space and the thin veil that separate this world from the glory that is to come; I know that my prayer is not vain because God's mercy endures forever.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, let us strive to make Our Lord's Beatitudes foremost in our lives; for they allow us to both bring forth and experience the light of Christ that continually breaks into our world, very often when the darkness seems unbearable and insurmountable. I discovered this light through mourning someone I loved. Let each of us allow Christ to bring forth his light when we live the Beatitudes and allow the grace that comes from them to shine forth in both heaven and on earth.