

During all the years we lived in Omaha, it seemed that whenever Judy or I would introduce ourselves to someone new, many people's first response would be this: "And how are you related to the Monsignor?" The question was so commonplace that most of us had a pretty-well-used response at the ready. Mine was simple: "He is my Uncle" followed by "I'm Bill's son." It is a very clannish way of introducing yourself but the identity to the O'Donnell name in Omaha was pervasive. The Monsignor was the undisputed patriarch of our family.

We buried Msgr. Edward O'Donnell this past Friday. He was 96. This is not at all meant to be a eulogy for a man whom you've never met, but the events of that day resonate loudly in my heart as I preach this particular Gospel.

As I sat from my vantage point at the altar of Holy Cross Church where he was Pastor for 25 years, I looked out into a sea of faces; I immediately recognized family of my father's generation, only 2 left now, my generation, my children's generation their children's generation and a few of their children as well.

There were over 100 Priests and there were hundreds people I did not and could not have recognized.

I could instinctively tell, except for the very young, that there was no one present just because they felt it was a duty. Each one had been either directly or indirectly effected by his generosity, insight and uncompromising challenges to live a better, holier life.

Today's Gospel raced into my mind and I realized that he truly was salt and light and a city on a hill, not just for our family, but for everyone he met.

The greatness of this humble man was that, he was simply showing everyone how it can be done. How to be Salt and Light.in his leadership, his counsel, his service and in his later years in his silent acceptance of his own aging and passing. Salt... and ... Light.

(PAUSE)

Each of us is called to be light, to shine and show the way for those in darkness and to expose the evil in the dark corners, the darkness so many insist doesn't exist.

This kind of Light, is not for ourselves, but to help illumine the entire city on the hill, a great metaphor for the Church, so that travelers, pilgrims and lost seekers can see their destination and find the safe harbor.

Each one of us is called again today, to be Salt of the Earth, to bring flavor, to enhance, the world around us.

We are salt to preserve and uphold values of decency and honor.

We are salt to melt the iciness of the hearts of those who hate.

We are salt, to destroy the fertile ground of sin.

We are salt to heal the wounds of broken relationships, those who are abused and those who are poor.

Salt and Light in our families! Salt and Light in our circle of friends! Salt and Light in the world!

My friends, when we are active in the world, though not of it, when we are ENGAGED in the people around us, not for our own sake but for theirs, when we are guided by the beacon of the Church in the events of our culture.... We become salt and light as Christ calls us.

We become that city on a hill beckoning those who are lost.

And what happens if we lose our saltiness? Jesus warns us flavorless salt becomes useless to His purpose.

Brothers and Sisters, how do we become salt that has been made flat? How is it that we put our lights under a basket?

When we do nothing in the face of evil, when we blend in so well that there is nothing distinctive about our ideas, opinions, actions, even our worship.....we become flat, dull, gray, flavorless.....unable to do anything of lasting value, unable to preserve anything worthy of keeping. We inspire no one and aspire to less than what we are meant to be. It is that important.

Let me give you an example using some recent history of the Church in America.

Prior to the Second Vatican Council, to be a Catholic WAS to be different. Our buildings were different, the sounds and the smells within them were different. Our schools and universities, our hospitals were different. Our communities were different, especially in the larger cities, because the Catholics tended to live in clusters, around their parishes. Kids played in Catholic sports leagues. Our social lives were parish centered as well. Everyone knew we were different. And we understood that different was good.

The problem was that we focused so much on our Catholic identity that we failed to effectively reach into society. There were few Catholic authors of popular books, there was almost no Catholic media, newspaper or magazines that reached anyone but Catholics, and with the exception of Bishop Sheen there were no Catholic radio or television shows that were tuned in by the secular world.

We were Catholics for the sake of other Catholics.

After the Second Vatican Council, we became, rightfully busy about the good work of reaching into the world. So busy and insistent, that we lost our "different-ness".

We became like most everyone else. In many minds, it is no different to be Catholic than it is to be Protestant, or Buddhist or agnostic.

In the good and holy effort to engage ourselves into the world, we became just a shadow of the world, with some of our only distinctions being our teachings on artificial contraception and abortion. And even on those,

many Catholics won't enter into dialogue for fear of alienating or upsetting someone. And when we are like everyone else... who needs us?

What difference do we make, what differences does it make to be Catholic, or even Christian?

We are tempted to think that what we need is a happy medium here, a non-swinging pendulum. But Christ does not call us to be salt OR light.

We are tempted to pick, at least within the Church, between pre and post Vatican II.

I disagree.

I believe we must find a way, not to be in the middle, but to be fully Catholic AND fully engaged.....to seek righteousness and justice for all and not be self-righteous or justifying of our bad actions and those of others.

We must be tuned in, attentive and responsive to the needs of others, and do so from the perspective of our Christian-ness, our Christ-ness and of our Catholic-ness.

If we who follow Christ do not become salt then who will? Oprah? Dr. Oz? It's already happening.

If we in the Church do not shine more brightly than all others, who will? Dr. Ruth? Our politicians?

To accept everyone else's view on sexuality, on politics, on morality, on life issues for the sake of compromise or perceived peace is to turn away from who we are meant to be, what we are meant to be....in Christ.

To be salt.....to be light..... and to be that city on the hill.