

FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME [A]

Isaiah 58: 7 – 10 1 Corinthians 2: 1 - 5 Matthew 5: 13 – 16

"I determined that while I was with you I would speak of nothing but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." 1 Cor. 2: 2

If the Custodii of the Vatican Museums could be distracted for a few moments so that you could lie on the floor of the Sistine Chapel and examine Michelangelo's ceiling without getting an awful crick in your neck, you'd notice one thing missing.

Michelangelo didn't include a scene of the Crucifixion of Jesus. Of course, on the end wall there's the Last Judgement, with a Greek-god like Jesus coming in glory, but nothing about the Cross, the Tree of Life.

It's as if, in all that beautiful art, the Crucifixion would have been too brutal to portray, because the Cross is frightening. The truth is that even Jesus was afraid of it; He knew how horrifying crucifixion would be.

He knew; and so great was His fear that on the night of Holy Thursday He sweated blood, and asked God: "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me." Mt. 26: 39

But, then surrendered Himself to the caress of His Father, and said: “Yet not as I will, but as you will.” Mt. 26: 39 And this is the difference.

The Cross scares us; we, naturally try to run away from bearing our own crosses for the sake of the Saviour.

Each one of us might think: ‘What will happen to me? What will my cross be like?’

We don’t know, but there will be a cross, and we need to ask for the grace not to flee when it comes.

Of course it scares us, but this is precisely where following Jesus takes us.

Paul, in writing to the Christians in Corinth, and saying he wants only to preach Christ, and Him crucified, has fresh in his mind his experience at Athens before going on to Corinth.

In Athens, he tried to use his own wisdom and persuasiveness to bring the Athenians to Christ: and only a couple of people, Dionysius and Damaris, became Christians after listening to him.

Paul learnt from that experience, and when he got to Corinth he sees that the only 'wisdom' he needs to give people new and everlasting life is to preach: "Christ crucified; the power of God and the wisdom of God." 1 Cor. 1: 23 – 24

So to bring people to faith in Christ we have to talk to them in a way they'll understand, but without letting go of the power and wisdom, which exists in the Crucified Christ.

If we put Jesus into a box and gift-wrap Him so He can be presented in a 'Crucifixion free, user-friendly package,' then we're going to end up with a caricature of the Living God, manufactured in our image.

The Crucified Christ is the power that saves, and the wisdom that leads us into the heart of God: "The mystery that has been kept secret for centuries and generations, but has now been revealed [to us in Christ]." Col. 1: 26

The last thing any of us wants to be is a failure because, to appear to be a failure, is seen as a sign of weakness in the world we live in.

I think since the Serpent hissed those tempting words: “Really? Did God really say you must not eat any of the fruit in the garden?” Gen. 3: 1 into the minds of Adam and Eve, it's been so. The primary temptation that we can do anything, and be anything, without God: in fact, in believing I alone am God. The biggest failure in the history of the universe is Jesus of Nazareth, because He claimed to be the One and Only Son of God.

"He created everything there is. Nothing exists that he didn't make." Jn. 1: 3 Yet He died on the Cross as a criminal and blasphemer. What a total failure!

But then I must be a total failure as well because, as Paul writes in another place: “I live my life by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Gal. 2: 20

At least that's what I try to do: but, too often I listen to the hissing of the Serpent, and find myself trying to live by not entrusting my life to God, and actually ending up very unhappy; and being a real failure because I've let go of Jesus.

I believe many people are put off Jesus because Christians can seem so unhappy, and negative about our life in Jesus.

That shouldn't be so because we have good news: no, we have the best news to give to people!

The joy of the Gospel is at the heart of Jesus, who said: "I have come that [you] may have life, and have it to the full." Jn. 10: 10

The new, and eternal life, which consists in loving communion with the Father, to which the Son calls each of us by the power of the Spirit.

If you listened to what Jesus said in today's Gospel you'd know that He's positive about life; He's positive about us.

He says to us: "You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world." Mt. 5: 13 & 14

He trusts us to give flavour, and light to His world – this small part of His world that we inhabit.

Jesus doesn't want us to be like salt that's lost its flavour or a light bulb that's gone out.

His heart's desire is that we should love Him, and then let His love flow out from us to others.

However, this love has to be rooted at the foot of the Cross, otherwise, it will be a sickly-sweet caricature of the love of Jesus

It was his Mother who was closest to Jesus at the Cross.

Perhaps today – and every day – it would be good to ask her for the grace not to run away from the Cross.

She was there, and she knows how to remain close to the Cross.

Through her prayer for us, may the Lord, lead us to live life to the full in: “Christ crucified; the power of God and the wisdom of God.” 1 Cor. 1: 23 – 24