

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Sep 23rd 2013

Some gospel passages are so familiar that it can be hard to hear their actual meaning and challenge. This is one such. First, when we attend to the context, we note that Jesus was not talking to individuals, but to the group of disciples, and it was the group that was to be the light of the world – in our case, the Church. Having been enlightened, having God’s forgiving love revealed to it, the Church cannot close in on itself or keep this treasure to itself. Like a lamp, it is to illuminate not just a single room, but the whole world. It is to do that in many ways, but clearly by manifesting its holiness, its commitment to justice, its concern for the poor and the marginalized – and to do so that intensely that, like a moth to a flame, the world is drawn to Christ. After all, as Vatican II declared, the Church is the “Sacrament of Christ” for the world. The very title of Vatican II’s Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (“a Light for the Nations”) is taken precisely from this gospel passage.

Attraction is the key here. Margaret Silf, in a column in *America* magazine, a few years ago used her real life experience of being stranded in a remote farmhouse in Scotland in a blizzard without power, to offer an image of Church. Children, pets, adults were all drawn to the large fireplace where there was light and warmth – drawn to that source and, inevitably, to one another – no TV, no internet, no social media – just one another and a source of life-sustaining warmth. That’s how the Church must operate, she said.

Now, while the Church as institution is the focus here, we individual Christians do not get off scot free for, in the last analysis, we are the Church. But, in these sayings Jesus wasn’t giving advice about individual sanctification. He was commissioning the group of disciples to carry on his work; he was commissioning us precisely to be the Christ – light – for our world.

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