

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Nov 30th -0001

Memorial of Saint Anthony of Padua, Priest and Doctor of the Church

Today is the Feast Day of Saint Anthony of Padua, though he was born in Lisbon. He is known as that saint one prays to when having lost something. He was a Franciscan theologian of the thirteenth century and a Doctor of the Church, but the helper of finding the lost is his present claim to honor in the Church.

We have begun the summer-long pilgrimage through Matthew's Gospel beginning with the famous Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes for the first steps. Today's verses begin with something being lost, perfect for the Feast of St. Antony!

I do not remember much from high school Chemistry, believe me, but for some reason I know that salt is Sodium Chloride, or aka "NACL". I haven't lost that one at least. The big question for the hearers of Jesus' talking was about salt's losing its saltiness or saltness. Maybe they had pretty cheap salt in those days, but I know for sure that in the kitchen of our little community there is a box of salt that is older than the house itself. So moving quickly past that chemical evaluation, what is Jesus talking about?

The teachings of Jesus form an identity which is more permanent than salt. These counter-cultural images of His followers being Peace-Makers, Poor of Spirit, Mercyers, Heart-Purers and Vulnerablers are to form their central ways of being regarded by themselves and others. As with salt then, they are to do what salt does? If it does not do what salt does, well then of course, it is no longer salt and is tossed out.

Today's Gospel reading ends with the image of "light" which as "light" is meant to be seen and also allows other realities to be seen because of that "light." In John's Gospel "Light" is Jesus. Here in Matthew "Light" is the interiorization of Jesus in the personal lives of His hearers.

Their living from the "Light" will illumine both the goodness of the realities and the goodness of Jesus relating through the lives of His followers. The speed of light is three hundred meters per second, which is faster than I can think about it. It does not move that quickly when hidden.

Jesus is saying that He wants out into the world as quickly as possible, in the lives of those who know their identities in Him. As salt does what it does as long as it is salt, so we, more slowly than light, are being encouraged to hear and believe who and what we are. We will hide under coverings that which we do not accept or believe. We will do what we are as long as we see the Light within us and do not lose our basic identities in Jesus.

St. Anthony, pray for us when we lose ourselves!

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