

“I feel like I’m being used.” I’ve made this statement. I’m guessing you have too. Perhaps you feel like your boss is burdening you with a workload that’s impossible to manage. Perhaps you’ve lent money to a family member and they’ve never paid you back. The statement “I feel like I’m being used” reflects our frustration with being underappreciated, unseen, and overtaxed. In the two examples I’ve used, we are right to set limits with others in order to preserve the dignity that is ours and which comes from God.

But the reality is we have been created by God *in order to be used*, in the best possible sense. Jesus makes that point when he teaches that we are the light of the world and we are salt for the earth. Those statements aren’t compliments about how he sees us. Those are commands as to how we are to act each and every day of our lives.

Paraphrasing Jesus, light isn’t an end unto itself. Light isn’t placed under a bushel basket. Doing so takes away from its purpose. Light is placed on a stand where it helps to guide, direct, and even protect all those in the house. Salt isn’t something that exists for its own sake. Rather, it is used to preserve things. It is used to purify things. It is used to bring flavor to food. In Jesus day, it was used as a catalyst for maintaining fire and heat in the communal ovens that several families in a neighborhood depended on.

Using those images, Jesus teaches that our faith is only good and valuable when we put it into practice by doing good for others.

It is not unusual when we go to confession to say things like: “I’ve missed Sunday Mass. I had lustful thoughts or acted in a lustful fashion. I lied (but we often qualify that sin by saying that it was a “white lie”). I gossiped about someone.” If I were to press the issue and ask the penitent why they are confessing these sins, there’s a good chance they would say that they want to be forgiven and being forgiven is how they can get to heaven.

But these items, like going to Mass and saying our prayers, are a means to building up our faith. And our faith isn’t something that is given to us in order to go to heaven. A lively and strong faith, and doing those things which build up our faith, are simply means for living out what Jesus commands us to do. And when we live out what Jesus commands us to do, we are already participating in his Kingdom and experiencing the heaven he talks about here on earth.

Isaiah the prophet gets quite specific in today’s first reading when he teaches how we should act. He tells his audience that they should share their bread with the hungry. They should shelter the homeless and clothe the naked. They should seek to liberate the oppressed. They should stop slandering and demeaning others. He concludes by saying that when we share our bread with the hungry and seek to address issues of inequality, then God’s light shines on us. And when God’s light shines on us then we are living as Jesus taught. That is how we end up being light for the world. And that is how we begin to share in the Kingdom of God and live as citizens in heaven.

It is interesting that Isaiah preached this particular passage to folks who were just coming back to Jerusalem after being exiled from their homeland by warring neighbor-nations which took over their native land. During this time they were crying out, “why has this happened to us? Why has God abandoned us?” Isaiah told them that they have experienced exile and desolation because they failed to take care of those in need around them.

If you are one of those people who say that we are living in horrible times, then ask yourself what you are NOT doing to fulfill the ways of the Lord.

In our parish and in our area, we have a variety of ministries that enable us to put into practice what Jesus and Isaiah the prophet teach. Our parish St. Vincent de Paul Outreach helps to feed the hungry. The folks who make meals for Pinellas Hope do the same. We have a ministry which brings Holy Communion to the sick, the homebound, nursing homes and assisted living facilities, as well as to our hospital. At Christmas, we collect gifts for migrant children. We collect money for our mission in Haiti to support teachers in our twin parish’s school and help to provide summer camps and vocational programs for the parishioners there. We have our interdenominational justice ministry called FAST – where we seek to address issues of injustice – like housing inequality, like seeking to preserve the water quality in our bay and canals, like better mental health services for those who are suffering.

Praying daily, going to Mass on Sunday, doing bible study, participating in prayer groups, saying a communal rosary are all worthwhile and blessed things. But we must realize that the

reason we do these things is to grow in faith. And the reason we seek to grow in the faith is to serve others. God calls us to be used. He commands us to use our talents, our energies, our time for the sake of others. Doing these things is what leads us to the Kingdom of God and to heaven.

If we are not doing these things, then we are falling short in the life which Christ commands us to live. If we are not doing these things, then these sins should be mentioned when we go to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Do you want to live in Christ's light? The answer each one of us should be giving to this question is a resounding "yes". Praying each day, saying our devotionals, and coming to Mass are all blessed practices. But these practices should be the catalyst which moves us get up off our knees and go out these doors or the front door of our homes to purposefully share the light of Christ with others in specific ways. As the prophet Isaiah proclaimed, acting in this way will shatter the gloom we often experience in life and make our lives as bright as the noonday sun.

Amen? Amen!