

## Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A

Fr Justin Driscoll, Co-Pastor

February 7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> 2026 6.00pm Ballarat East, 9.00am Bungaree, 10.30am Ballarat East

### **Homily**

In the process of parishes coming together to reconfigure and form new entities like the process that the three parishes of our Ministry District have embarked upon, some of those that are further ahead in this process than we are, have been considering names for their future reconfigured parishes and church communities, not the particular churches themselves which retain their existing name. Churches such as St Alipius or Ss Peter and Paul, St Michael's, St Brendan, Brigid or Patrick will continue to be known by their existing names. Some places have asked for suggestions and voted from amongst the top ten nominated and arrived at a new name. So far most of them have been saints – such as St Mary of the Cross MacKillop, St Paul VI (as the first Pope to set foot in Australia), Ss Joachim and Anne, but I note that St Justin, Priest and Martyr hasn't been selected as yet, while others capture images of God such as Holy Trinity, or other images such as Holy Family or have a Marian flavour of Star of the Sea.

About all of this I guess I'll just say that I haven't been too excited – not that I'm critical of any of the names for these reconfigured parishes, but what caught my attention and appealed to my imagination was when I saw churches in one of our Great Ocean Road parishes proposing to identify themselves as the *Catholic Communities of Salt and Light*<sup>1</sup>. Why it appealed to my imagination is because they could see that the name by which they might be identified, the mission that they have been entrusted with and their context, that part of the world and its particular geography in which they live are in creative dialogue. **Mission, Identity and Context.**<sup>2</sup> Mission identity context refers to the foundational understanding of "who we are" (identity) as defined by "why we exist" (mission), within the specific circumstances that are our context.

Mission is not an invention of the church, but an initiative of God in which believers are called to participate. It involves moving from a self-centric identity to one defined by alignment with God's redemptive work, often using gifts and vocations for service.

**That** Mission is never abstract; it must be applied to specific times and places.

And it's **Communal**: It is not a solo endeavour but is grounded in the communal nature of the Church, where we become and express our identity through baptism as the Body of Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> [The Parishes of Apollo Bay, Colac and Cororooke](#)

**Salt and Light**, straight from today's Gospel that's a continuation of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount and the primacy of Jesus' Beatitudes is creative and imaginative for such coastal communities that gives priority to Mission in Context rather than arriving at a name that's more suited to a amalgamation of shire and councils or health care providers or some other NGO.

Until I'd read Barbara Reid's reflection on this Gospel commission to be salt and light<sup>3</sup> I'd thought that knowing someone as salt of the earth and understanding that to mean them as a solid citizen, reliable and trustworthy would be helpful in an interpretation of this Gospel imagery. Rather, she gathers together some of the understandings that Jesus' first hearers and Matthew's community would have brought from their own biblical and cultural awareness that would identify the uses of salt in the ancient world to include **seasoning, preservation, purification and judgement**, so that in saying '**You** are salt of the earth', Jesus could have meant that they perform any and all of these functions: that they draw out the liveliness and savour of God's love in the world: that they're a sign of God's eternal fidelity and that they bring to judgement all that is opposed to God's reign.

It's only Matthew's Gospel that joins these two metaphors of salt and light, just as it's unique in equating disciples with light and this Gospel draws on the prophet Isaiah that offers the vision of Jerusalem, set upon God's mountain to which all of the nations shall stream calling its hearers to walk in the light of the Lord. The image of light and of the city set on a mountain and a lamp on a stand speak of the all-encompassing nature of the disciples' witness – to be light for the whole world. This light is equated with good works – the stress in on the ethics of discipleship and the purpose of such good works is that they lead to praise of God. Both salt and light are most effective when they draw attention not to themselves, but to something beyond themselves giving taste, warmth or illumination beyond themselves – that's quite a mission and a people that bear the name *salt and light* would be aware of their God given mission, the context in which they seek to give witness, that invites a deep relationship with the one to whom all of their good works are oriented.

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<sup>2</sup> [Mission and Identity](#)

<sup>3</sup> Barbara E. Reid OP, *Parables for Preachers* (The Liturgical Press: Collegeville MN, 2001), 45.