Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, February 5, 2017

Isaiah 58:7-10

Psalm 112

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Matthew 5:13-16

February is the shortest month – but it seems like the longest. Cold, cloudy, bleak, snowy –and the lake is only 3% ice.

So let’s look at the readings. Maybe there’s some good news in the Good News.

Who and what do we find in Isaiah? The hungry, the oppressed, the homeless, the naked, the afflicted, oppression, false accusation, and malicious speech. And we are supposed to be the ray of sunshine in all this. “Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer, you shall cry for help, and He will say: Here I am!”

What if his answer falls on deaf ears – deafened by the misery that surrounds us?

What about St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians? He says, “I came to you in weakness and in fear and much trembling.” Sounds like us in the month of February.

The Gospel? If we don’t feel peppy like salt, the so-called salt is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. Great. Then we are to be the “light of the world”. What if our Energizer Bunny has powered down?

February. Blah.

Yet. Yet if we take a walk outside, say over by the Our Lady of Lourdes Shrine, we can find the dwarf pussy willow tree dedicated to Dino Dipizio. Look closely and we can see it is already budding forth with little pussy willow catkins.

There’s hope. There’s hope for us in the month of February! New life emerging from the cold, cloudy, bleak, and snowy Winter time of our lives. There is hope that Spring will spring again. The catkins show us so. There is hope!

Yes, we can be as tasty as salt! Yes, we can be a light burning brightly! Yes, we can be faith-filled people with a demonstration of Spirit and power! Yes, we can muster the strength to share our bread; clothe the naked; remove oppression, false accusation, and malicious speech; bestow our bread on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted. Yes, we can, because we have hope.

Hope is the spark that re-ignites our faith and our charity. With hope, we can take off our headphones of gloom and hear the Lord shouting in our ears, “Here I am!”

Yet. Yet if we find ourselves lost in the gloom of pain and sickness, it is so hard, so hard, to acknowledge the Lord and find the catkins of hope in our lives.

There is a young boy – barely a teenager- that has come down with a mysterious illness that causes pain day and night. The doctors have named the disease but have yet to find a cure. Can you imagine your child – a formerly robust, athletic, energetic young man, feeling pain all over his body both day and night? And nothing can touch the pain – the pain so grievous that no drug can touch it. The pain is this boy’s life, this mom and dad’s life, his greater family’s life. Where can hope be? The faith of the family is starting to crumble under the psychic pain of “What can I do? How can I help” and the roaring silence of a God with prayers not answered.

There has to be prayer, however. For without prayer there is no hope at all. So then what can we do? We can pray. Pray for the boy and pray for the family. We can give them hope by saying “We’ll pray for you.” We can give them hope by offering money to cover medical expenses. We can give them hope by sharing their pain and then offering our pain in tears and supplications to our God.

So I ask you as a faith community to pray for this boy. Pray for this boy day and night. And pray hard. You need not know his name. God knows. And if God is anything like us, He’ll shed a few tears along with us. In this case, nature has taken a bad turn. A reversal has to be supernatural. Pray for this boy and pray for his family and pray hard. Please.