

Homily – Light in a World That Needs It

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You are beautiful. Each one of you is beautiful. Each one of us is beautiful. Do you believe in this beauty?

Each one of you should have received a sticker as you arrived today. Some of you have already put them on. You can see that these little stickers are mirrors. They are mirrors in which we are telling the people around us that they are beautiful.

Our world needs more beauty. Actually, that is not accurate. Our world has a lot of beauty in it, but we often fail to see the beauty. We fail to see the beauty in world around us, in the people around us, and even in ourselves. Nevertheless, you are beautiful.

Growing up we had a poster on the door of our guest bathroom. As you sat in the bathroom you looked at this large poster that had this saying from Herb Barks.

“Believe it, you are a real find, a joy in someone’s heart. You are a jewel, unique and priceless. God don’t make no junk.”

I don’t know who Herb Barks is, but for thousands of time I stared at his saying so that it is branded into my brain. Let me repeat it.

“Believe it, you are a real find, a joy in someone’s heart. You are a jewel, unique and priceless. God don’t make no junk.”

As an adolescent, as a teen-ager and even as a young adult, I read these words thousands of times. But, I still didn’t believe them. I knew that I was hiding something, and I was filled with shame. At the time, I thought I was alone in feeling shame, but I probably wasn’t. “God don’t make no junk” didn’t seem to apply to me.

Even though I didn’t believe these words, I have to thank my mother, who is here today, for making sure that we all had thousands of opportunities to see and read these words.

“Believe it, you are a real find, a joy in someone’s heart. You are a jewel, unique and priceless. God don’t make no junk.”

It wasn’t until later in life that I started to internalize and accept these words, at least some of the time.

Now, the phrase from that poster is too long for a sticker. So, I think that is why I have taken such a shine to the little mirror stickers. You are beautiful. Can you see how the message is the same? You are beautiful.

Our Gospel reading that we heard just a few minutes ago is also telling us that we are full of beauty. This reading is part of the Sermon on the Mount. The most famous part of these teachings of Jesus are the Beatitudes. *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, or they will be comforted."* Like I said today's reading about salt and light is also from the Sermon on the Mount.

And like many of Jesus' best teachings, we have twisted the meaning to be different than Jesus had intended. Somehow we have made the salt and light about who is going to heaven and who is not going to heaven. Woe to those of you who have lost your salty flavor or hidden your light. Today, I want to reassure you that this is not what Jesus meant for us to take from his teachings.

Instead we should read them as statements about life and about possibility and about the beauty that has already been built into each and every one of us.

Salt was seen as precious. For ancient people, salt was of great value. It was important for preserving, seasoning, and curiously a symbol of healing. When Jesus says, "You are the salt of the earth" he is telling you that you are precious.

And, when Jesus says "You are the light of the world" he is telling you that you have Christ within you waiting to shine out and illumine the beauty of the world around you.

Now, there are two ancient thirteenth century teachings about this light. First, St. Thomas Aquinas taught that we are like a window, and the light of God shines through us like a transparent window. With this imagery the light is an external sourcing shining from outside of us, and through us.

And, a few decades later the Franciscan, John Duns Scotus, taught that human beings are like a lamp. We had an inner source of light that shines out onto the things around us. In this way our light helps us see God's image in the people around us. We see the sacredness of the created world. God's indwelling presence is in all things. Whether we see it or not, the Christ is inherent in all and cannot be earned or destroyed.

Thomas Merton was a twentieth century American Trappist monk, writer, theologian, mystic, poet, social activist, and scholar of comparative religion. Merton wrote the following.

“I have the immense joy of being a human being, a member of a race in which God became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now I realize what we all are. And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.”

“There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.”

God don't make no junk.
You are the salt of the earth.
You are the light of the world.
You are wonderfully made.
You are precious.
You are beautiful.

Now, I think there are a lot of reasons that we don't accept our inner light.

Shame, guilt, and feelings of inadequacy are all internal barriers to accepting the light that already inside of us.

There can be a sense that we are not smart enough, funny enough, or pretty enough.

And let's not forget how racism, sexism, homophobia and classism are external forces that push us down and damped our acceptance of the light.

We have forgotten how to see the image of Christ that is stamped into each and every one of us.

In this lifetime, most of us have egos and false selves that get in the way of our relationship with God, others, and self. Do we need to be in control, be admired, feel useful, or be better than others? Our egos and false selves get in the way of seeing the beauty of the light that already surrounds us. The ego and false-self act as a bushel basket that is put over the lamp. It is such an unnecessary waste when we hide the light.

I wish I had a magic pill that I could take this problem away or there was a button to push that would instantaneously fix this.

I wonder what our lamp stand is to help each one of shine like the brightness of the sun?

Perhaps the first step is to realize the true point of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is teaching us about things that God has already built into us. We are the salt. We are the light.

And next, we need to recognize the need the world has for our light. No one else has the light the way you do. We each need you shine out into a world that sorely needs our light.

And next, we need to recognize the many simple ways to be the light.

Share some time with someone and be present with them, really present.

Write a note or card to someone expressing the light you see in them.

Graciously accept a compliment when you receive one.

Share the gift of learning or hospitality.

Give someone a “you are beautiful sticker” or even wear the sticker so that others may see themselves reflected in the beauty.

We may not realize all of the ways that we are already the light in someone else’s life. And, while you are at it, consider who is the light in your life.

Remember it may not be what the other person has done for you. It may just be their being itself.

There are so many ways to shine in this world. Our light enables others to see God. When we are the hands and feet and voice of Jesus in the world we make it brighter for all.

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You are the salt of the earth.
You are the light of the world.
You are wonderfully made.
You are precious.
You are beautiful.