

## Mass with Teachers for the Start of the Academic Year

28 August 2019<sup>α</sup>

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Hilary Mantel, the author of the Booker Prize winning novels *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, wonderful historical novels set during the 16<sup>th</sup> century English Reformation, which I have even read, gave an interview at the height of her fame, six or seven years ago, in which she said, “I think that nowadays the Catholic Church is not an institution for respectable people.”

Another writer recalls a conversation with a colleague once who declared: “I simply don’t know how any intelligent person can be a Catholic.”

These are astonishing remarks, especially the second one, as it was made at an academic conference in a prominent Catholic university.

Jesus calls his disciples, those who follow him and want to learn from him, ‘the salt of the earth’ and ‘the light of the world.’ In biblical culture salt was one of the essential elements that sustained life and it was a necessary part of sacrificial offerings to God.

Salt changes the taste of things and it has purifying and preservative qualities too. But its very taste was also significant in biblical times because it represented the bitterness of hardship and sacrifice, what it took to live for God and others rather than oneself.

Even apart from Jewish and Christian traditions, salt was a valuable commodity. The Romans paid people with salt which is where our word ‘salary’ comes from of course.

There is a lot that has come to light in the life of the church in recent decades that has truly scandalised people, both inside the church and outside it and which gives our detractors plenty to use against us. Facing it and making the changes necessary to ensure we do not repeat what happened in the past may be said to be the salt in our lives as church these days.

The Church is a communion of the broken: the lame and the halt. We are sinners, made aware of ourselves before the God we believe to be all truth.

But, having acknowledged that, we also hear Christ tell us that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. There are facts about the work of Christians around the world and especially those of us in the Catholic tradition that do give us hope. They renew our faith because they are examples of love in action. In Africa, for example, the Catholic Church provides one quarter of all health care and provides 12 million school places in sub-Saharan Africa.

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Castleknock College's involvement in the Vincentian Lay Missionaries' work in Ethiopia and particularly the Deaf Project in Ambo is part of that.

Our work as educators in Castleknock is part of a universal call to service. We live altruistically, for the greater good of others apart from ourselves especially, in our case, the boys entrusted to us by parents who ask us to help them make their boys young men.

As Christians we believe that the world and the life we have received is worth something. We believe that in Christ we have become a new creation, as our rite of baptism tells us. It is because we have put on Christ that we are able to think more of ourselves. It is because we take Christ at his word that we can begin to see that our faith is not really the priority here actually.

When Jesus says, "You are the salt of the earth...the light of the world," we may allow ourselves to be breath-taken because the story of our faith begins with God's faith in us! The Son of God calls us the salt of the earth and the light of the world.