

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2014

All the readings of this Sunday talk about the practical dimension of our faith. They show us that the confession of faith contains both a spiritual and a social dimension. They invite us to open our eyes to the obligations we have to fulfill for the good of our brothers and sisters as consequence of our faith in Jesus Christ.

The first reading of Isaiah describes God's exhortations to the people of Israel concerning social justice. It recalls that prayer and worship are meaningless if they neglect the social concerns toward the poor and the needy. It highlights the heart of what pleases God, namely, sharing with the needy, providing shelter to the homeless, clothing the naked and fighting injustice and oppression. Finally, the text highlights the result that comes out of the application of social justice, namely the reception of God's blessings and multiple favors from God.

What is behind this text is the idea that because a human being is body and soul, the Confession of faith has to deal with both his spiritual and social concerns. Another idea is a reminder to us that sharing is the fundamental philosophy of our Christian life. The last idea is relative to the justification of the social teaching of the Church as she cares not only for the soul, but also for the body of the believers.

This text allows us to understand the stake of today's Gospel as Jesus reminds us of our duties toward the world. First of all, the Gospel starts with Jesus' affirmation that the disciples are the salt of the earth. Then, he recognizes that the property of salt being seasoning the food, it would be useless, if it cannot fulfill that role anymore. After that, Jesus declares that the disciples are the light of the world. Moreover, he sustains that they are like a city set on mountain which cannot be hidden.

Like in the case of salt, Jesus holds that nobody lights a lamp in order to put it under a bushel basket, but rather on a lamp stand in order give light to all in the house. He concludes by saying that, in the same way, the disciples must shine before others so that they may see their good deeds and glorify God.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about the practical side of our vocation as disciple of Jesus. I formulate this subject on the basis of the invitation of Jesus in today's Gospel to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

First of all, Jesus' suggestion that we be the salt and the light of the world presupposes that the Gospel does not deal only with individual salvation so that once a person is assured of his salvation, there is no need of caring about what is going around him. On the contrary, Jesus' invitation suggests that even if the individual has a personal guarantee of his salvation, he still has to impact the world around him.

In that sense, personal salvation cannot be disconnected from the salvation of others. We cannot be content only for our salvation while many others are going to their loss. As we have responsibility for our personal salvation, so we bear some responsibility for the salvation of our fellows. In other words, we can be to our fellows an occasion of fall as well as a chance for their salvation, a blessing or a curse.

That understanding creates an ethical dimension we have to satisfy in order to truly be the disciples of Jesus. We are morally responsible for the salvation of our fellows. Of course, we have to care for ourselves, but we have to care also for others. If we do not

do so, our pursuit of salvation becomes a selfish endeavor that locks us from the possibility of being a chance for the others in search for their salvation.

Does it mean that we have to act on behalf of our fellows when they do not want to do anything for their salvation? Not at all; the truth is that in the matter of salvation each person is responsible before God and has to do whatever he should in order to acquire it. However, what Jesus brings here is that we, as Christians, have a duty defined by our faith to help others in their search for salvation. That is why we are like the light and the salt to the world. The role of the salt, indeed, is to season the food so that it becomes tasty. The role of the light, in fact, is to enlighten those who live in darkness. That is what we have to be to our fellows.

In that perspective, we are like the guides that lead others to know God and to love him. If we cannot do that, we fail in the profession of our own faith because we are mostly selfish in limiting the conception of salvation to ourselves only, and not extending it to others. It is like a poor man who, by working hard, has become rich, but strives with all his strength to keep the neighbors in an impoverishing situation in which he was before so that they may not become like him.

Moreover, by suggesting that we be the light of the world and the salt of the earth, Jesus is inviting us to have a second look on our confession of faith. In fact, Jesus' invitation is an insistence that we have a real impact and a visible glow on people around us and in the world.

That is why he insists that "we let our light shine", which literally means "Do not hide your light". The consequence of such a perception is that we have to lead a Christian life that is enlightening to others and, in fact, has influence in the world.

Please, do not get me wrong as though automatically once we live a real Christian life, the world will follow us. That would be an illusion and, at same time, a delusion. The truth is that by living this way, we make a difference, because we give a witness to the world that we are guided by high Christian standards. Even if they do not believe us or follow us, at least they have the witness of our faith.

However, we should not be afraid to do it. The big temptation is always to say "how can a witness of one individual change the whole world? Please, think about Martin Luther King in this country or Mandela in South Africa. Your witness and example, so tiny as they might be, are valuable for the kingdom of God and the salvation of your fellows.

We should also not forget, as human experience has taught us, that many people have been converted to God because they have been challenged by the example of the life of true Christians that they have been compelled to change and look for their salvation. Let us, then, pray and ask the Lord to help us be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Let us make our faith practical by the example of our life. God bless you all.

Isaiah 58: 7-10; 1 Corinthians 2: 1-5; Matthew 5: 13-16



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