

Fifth Sunday in OT A/2019

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 bodily concerns. Another idea is a reminder to us that solidarity and generosity are fundamental parts of Christian philosophy of 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 asserts that the property of salt being that of seasoning of food, it would be useless if the salt 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 a mountain which cannot be hidden. Like in the case of salt, Jesus holds also 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 obligations of faith. In fact, in the Gospel of Mark (12: 30-31), there is a question asked of Jesus by a Scribe about which of the commandments was the greatest. In his answer, Jesus said that "to love God" with the whole being and "to love the neighbor" as ourselves were the two greatest of the commandments.

According to this Jesus' statement, the confession of faith has two dimensions. While one deals specifically with God, the other deals with the neighbor. Those two dimensions command the obligations we have to fulfill vis-à-vis God or vis-à-vis our fellows. Those two dimensions are bound up together and cannot be separated except for the sake of explanation or clarification.

The obligations vis-à-vis God constitute the spiritual dimension of our commitment as Christians and the obligations vis-à-vis our fellows constitute the social dimension of our faith. In that sense, when Jesus invites his disciples to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, he is highlighting the importance of the practical and social dimension of faith.

In fact, our profession of faith is not an ensemble of statements which deal only with God and have nothing to do with human beings. On the contrary, it refers to both God and human beings. In other words, our profession of faith determines the type of relationship we can have with God and at the same time the type of obligations we have to fulfill toward our fellow human beings.

Such a vision of things has practical consequences, some of which I want to share with you. First, with regard to the respect of the Law, it means that God's commandments are not one-sided. For that reason, even though one would have fulfilled his duty vis-à-vis God, he still has the obligation to attend to the needs of his fellows. That is why in the Confiteor at the beginning of each Mass, we say, "I confess to Almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters that I have sinned.

Second, with regard to the understanding of human life, we cannot separate the protection of human life from the pursuit of social justice. I know that this is still a difficult question in the mind of some people.

For instance, in one of the parishes I was before, I was in charge of the Respect Life Committee. The pastor asked me to consider some discussion over the social teachings of the Church. When I brought the question, some of the members protested under the allegation that had nothing to do with Respect Life.

In the end, I asked myself: what life is worth being protected? Is it only that of unborn or also that which is lost in war and through hunger and poverty? That is why it is important that we understand that we have to care for the soul as well as for the body.

Finally, with regard to the concept of salvation, it means that even though our individual salvation is important and we have to dedicate our life to it, we still have to impact the world around us. Moreover, it means that our personal salvation cannot be disconnected from the salvation of others.

Such an understanding creates an ethical dimension we have to satisfy in order to truly be the disciples of Jesus. In other words, we are morally responsible for the salvation of our fellows. If our faith has no impact around us, our pursuit of salvation becomes a selfish endeavor that locks us from the possibility of being a chance for the others in their search for their salvation.

That is why Jesus says that, we are 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.

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, so that they strove to change and become better persons and Christians. May the Lord make us salt and light for our brothers and sisters!

Isaiah 58: 7-10; 1 Corinthians 2: 1-5; Matthew 5: 13-17



Homily Date: February 09, 2020
© 2020 – Fr Felicien I. Mbala, PhD, STD
Contact: www.mbala.org
Document Name: 20200209homily.pdf