

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time A2023

One day a teacher of the law asked Jesus a question: "Master, what is the greatest of the commandments? Jesus answered: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." (...) And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Mt 22:35-40; Mk 12:28-34; Lk 10:27).

According to this Jesus' answer, Christian faith has two dimensions: one vertical and the other horizontal. The vertical dimension is about our relations with God and the horizontal about our relations with our fellow human beings. Those two dimensions are so interrelated that we cannot talk about one without the other. These two dimensions command duties and obligations we have to fulfill vis-a-vis God and vis-a-vis our brothers and sisters.

Those two dimensions of faith appear clearly in the proposal Isaiah presents to the people of Israel. He reminds them that prayer and worship, though important, are not enough if they neglect the social concerns toward the poor and the needy. They have to share their bread with the hungry, to provide shelter to the oppressed and the homeless, to clothe the naked and to get rid of selfishness. If they act in such a way, God will bless them in time of their needs and protect them in time of adversity; he will heal all their wounds and hear their prayer. So will their light shine in darkness and their gloom become like midday.

By maintaining tight these two dimensions in one's life makes the disciple someone special, who is not anybody, a man and a woman in whom Jesus is present and through whom he acts. In other words, the disciples of Jesus are different from the other men and women of the earth by their effort to imitate Jesus, to live by his standards and to transform the world guided by his words.

Then, it make sense Jesus can say, "You are the salt of the earth", "You are the light of the earth." Remark that Jesus does not say, "You should be salt and light." He says, "You are salt and light." So what does all that mean and how does it affect us today?

In the ancient world, salt was highly valued. It was connected with purity; it was used to keep things from going bad, and to hold putrefaction at bay. Even today, salt lends flavor to things. What would be food without salt except insipid and tasteless?

Salt was indeed the most primitive of all offerings to the gods, and to the end of the day the Jewish sacrifices were offered with salt. "Every cereal offering that you present to the Lord shall be seasoned with salt" (Leviticus 2: 13). So, if we have to be the salt of the earth, we must be people who hold aloft the standard of absolute purity in speech, in conduct and even in thought. We can never depart from the standards of strict honesty.

If we want to be the salt of the earth, we must have a certain antiseptic influence on life. What does it mean? We have to be like a cleansing antiseptic that kills the germs that can make the wound worsen. This way, by our presence the bad is defeated and it becomes easier for others to become good people.

If we want to be the salt of the earth, we have to lend flavor to life as salt lends taste to food. in other words, in a world depressed by many problems, we have to be the people full of joy of life.

For sure, we are meant to be the salt of the earth, that is, people who make a difference in the lives of others in the world, but if we cannot fulfill this duty of bringing to life, the antiseptic power, the radiance that we ought, then, we prepare a disaster. That is why Jesus is right to say that if the salt loses its saltiness, it is good for nothing.

Jesus says also, "You are the light of the world". What does he mean by that? We are the light of the world by our baptism because through it we have been conformed to Christ, the light of the world. Our being light is by assimilation to Christ who is the light of the light and who lives within us.

Generally, a light is something which is above all to be seen. A light is a guide and light warns, like the traffic light. If we want to be the light, we need to have a real impact and a visible glow on people around us and in the world. The whole of our being should reflect the light of Christ who lives in us and acts through us.

Our influence in the world should be made visible by the way we deal with the important problems affecting our society and our world. One of things this world needs more than anything else is people who are prepared to be channels of goodness. The world needs its guiding lights; there are people waiting and longing for a lead to take a stand and to do the thing which they do not dare by themselves.

Like the road light that is used to regulate the traffic or the warning light at the estuary of a river, or a light that is used to lighten a house, as Christians, we have to be the ones who make the way clear to others. We have to be those who help others to reach their security by putting their lives into God's hands. We have to be those who warn others about the risk they are running, especially the youngest, so that they may not lose their way to eternal life.

When we would have done all that, we should not, however, forget that it is for the glory of God and not for our own. In other words, we should never do goodness in order to attract the attention on us, but always for the glory of God. Otherwise, we have paid ourselves through what we have done and, in that case, we prevent God from rewarding us when the time will come.

That is why we should never think of what we have done, but rather of what God has enabled us to do for his glory. That spirit of humility and effacement is what we find in St Paul. He came to the Corinthians in simplicity, fear and trembling. He did not rely on human achievements as he brought them the Gospel, but rather on God alone. After all, faith rests not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

Let us ask the Lord the grace of having always present before our eyes the double structure of our faith, namely the relationship with God and the relationship with our fellows. Let us ask him the courage to fulfill our spiritual duties toward him without neglecting our social duties toward others. May he give us the courage to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world for the glory of his name! God bless you all!

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



Homily Date: February 05, 2023
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Document Name: 20230205homily