

Fifth Sunday of the Year February 05, 2017

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

Today's Readings place an emphasis on Christian faith and call every Christian to be the shining light in the world. In Matthew's Gospel everyone is called by Jesus to be salt and light for others, for the world. Our lives, what we do and the way we do things, should be a source of light and meaning for others. Our actions should be a visible sign for others of God's presence in the world. A Christian has to be outstanding before everyone through his deeds and must enlighten all. In the Old testament God had been telling His chosen people through Prophet Isaiah that He would send a Light in the world to save His people and the gentiles. In the First Reading of today Prophet Isaiah asks the people of Israel to be the shining light to all the people. They who had returned from the Babylonian exile they would be like the light. However the prophet tells them that they would be light if they free the oppressed, share their bread with the hungry and shelter the homeless poor. The responsorial psalm corroborates with this saying that a just person is a light in darkness to the upright. St. Paul's theme is slightly different; for him Christianity is not merely a doctrine or theory on life, but the person of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit in people's lives. Paul realized that we can draw the world to the love of God by making our actions presentable and active before people. Therefore there is a strong spiritual link between the power of God and our good works. For him Christ crucified was the heart of his message.

In the First Reading of today Prophet Isaiah asks the people of Israel to be the shining light to all the people. The Israelites were asked to fast as the means through which their bonds of injustice could be broken and the oppressed would receive their freedom. They were told to share their bread with the hungry, give shelter to the homeless, display compassion, and speak the truth and utter words that heal. They were asked to cover the naked and not to hide themselves from their relatives who may need their assistance. Through these good works, they would be like the light of dawn shining before the people. As the oppressors withdrew before them, their sadness would turn into joy. Then the glory of the Lord would be their rear guard, protecting them from unexpected hardships. After having performed all these good works of righteousness the people shall call upon the Lord and He will answer them, "Here I am." But first, they must get rid of the evil around them, the pointing of finger to others, their gossiping, their false accusations, the speaking of evil

and all things that displease God. When they share their food with the hungry and deliver justice to those who are afflicted, then their light shall rise in the darkness and their gloom will be like the noonday. As a result, where there was despair, there will be hope; where there was death, there shall be life; where there was sorrow, and there shall be joy. By true fasting, by enduring long-term hunger, the rich come to the realization that there is something greater in life than worldly fame, pleasures and wealth. They come to the realization that hunger and suffering are temporary, but joy and peace are eternal, the fulfillment of the promise of God.

In the Second Reading Paul tells the Corinthians that when he approached them, it was to proclaim to them the mystery of Jesus Christ and he crucified and he had nothing else in his mind. There was no intent to use lofty words or wisdom to deceive the Corinthians. Arrogance and procrastination was not part of his purpose. When Paul was in Corinth he went in weakness and in fear with much trembling. It was not an easy task for him. He tells them how he was opposed and reviled. He was brought before the tribunal, accused of influencing the people to worship a God contrary to the law. In his love for the Lord Jesus he endured much. Whatever was accomplished through him as a light in the world, it was not because of his own doing. His speech and his proclamation were not plausible words of wisdom. They were a demonstration of the Spirit and of power so that the faith of the believers may not rest on human wisdom, but on the power of God. Paul was the instrument of God through which the Holy Spirit produced good works. Without the power of the Spirit, there would have been no good works. Without the protection of the Spirit, Paul would not have lasted so long as he did in Corinth. Through his obedience, his servitude and his humility, he was to become a worthy instrument of the Lord. The faith of the Corinthians rested entirely on the power of God, not on human wisdom. It is the gift of Jesus through the Spirit.

The Gospel passage presented to us today follows immediately after the announcement of Beatitudes calls every one to be the living witnesses of faith. It tells how the Beatitudes must be lived in our daily lives and how it is essential for the Christian disciple both to be seen and heard. It is essential to know that Christianity is not a private religion. A Christian must have to have a vision and a mission. Christianity is a vision which is meant to change the outlook of the world and bring the good news to all. A Christian has a mission to put the teachings of Jesus and in particular the Beatitudes into practice.

Jesus uses several images to express this practical aspect: He wants his disciples to be the salt of the earth and wants them to be the light to the world. Both these elements have to fulfill their purpose namely to give taste to food and to give enlightenment to people. Similarly a Christian disciple too has to live his mission on earth and manifest the presence of Christ to all. If he fails then he is no longer worthy of being called a follower or a friend of Jesus, leave alone be called a son or daughter of God. He is no longer worthy of the eternal inheritance that awaits all those who persevere in their living faith.

Jesus tells his disciples that they have to be the salt of the earth. When Jesus used this image of salt, he would have meant how a disciple of his must be valuable and precious like the salt he uses. In the ancient world salt was a highly valued commodity. Salt was connected with purity and its glistening whiteness made this connection easy. The Romans said that salt was purest of all things because it came from purest of elements, the sun and the sea. Salt was indeed most primitive of all offerings to God and the Jewish offering were always offered along with salt. It is a basic and essential item of normal diet and was the commonest of all preservatives. In the absence of the refrigeration system those days salt was used to keep things from turning bad and keep items fresh. Even today it is used to preserve edible items over a long period of time in many places. Maybe the medical sciences of today tend to reduce the intake of too much salt and people are warned against it. But in older times it was a precious and often expensive commodity and because of its value it was often a favourite item of taxation. We remember Gandhi's famous campaign in India against the salt tax imposed by the British Government in India. It had in ancient times strong economic value as it was used as an item of currency in exchange for goods. Sometimes the wages were paid in fixed quantity of salt. But the greatest and the most obvious quality of salt is that it lends flavor to things. It is used as an item for seasoning as it gives all the necessary taste for food even though by itself it does not have any acceptable taste. Food without salt is sadly insipid. Christianity to life is what salt is to food and Christianity must lend flavor to life.

In his second imagery Jesus emphasizes the essential visibility of the Christian. He says that a Christian disciple must be the light of the world. Light is a rich image running throughout the entire Bible. He explains it further by using a third imagery that a city built on a hill cannot be hidden. During ancient times, the crown of a city was considered a good place to build a city. It enabled them to see the enemies at a distance and defend themselves

more easily. Even in a house when a lamp is lit no one places it under a basket he says, but on the lampstand so that it gives light to all in the house. So Jesus tells his disciples that there cannot be hidden discipleship, rather they have to let their light shine before others. People who witness them and see their good works will give glory to the Father in heaven. When Jesus spoke these words he was using an expression which was quite familiar to the Jews that spoke of Jerusalem as the light to the gentiles. A light is first and foremost something which is meant to be seen. The houses in Palestine were very dark with one small circular window in it. It was not easy to rekindle a lamp in days when matches did not exist. They carefully kept it on a stand so that all in the house were able to see. Jesus tells his disciples that Christianity is something which is meant to be seen is seen by all. Again light is a guide in the darkness. It shows the path; it is necessary to make clear the way. It dispels the darkness, makes things visible, shows the obstacles that exist on the way and leads a person to his destiny. A light can also be a warning light. It tells us to halt when danger is ahead. In the Wisdom Literature, light is symbolized as knowledge and understanding. It depicts the enlightenment in the person as he contemplates the divine mystery.

The Reading further tells us of the consequence of not fulfilling the task of being salt and light. It tells us that if salt loses its taste, no one can restore its ability to give taste to food or become a preservative. Jesus says that it is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot. Technically salt never loses its saltiness, but it can be contaminated through impurities and other pollutants. In other words, when we stop doing good works, and are contaminated, then we are no longer worthy of being called the disciples of Jesus. We are no longer worthy of the eternal inheritance that awaits all those who persevere in their living faith. Similarly a light also has its function to fulfill, namely to make things bright and give light to the house. In the same way a Christian has to shine before others. A Christian cannot but be the light of Christ. Spiritually we do not produce our own light; we are the reflection of the light of Christ. In life we have two choices. In the likeness of Christ, we can shine as a light in the world or we could be rejected by God for failing to realize the ideal of the life of the Gospels. We cannot have both. The outcome of our eternal blessings entirely depends on the choice we make now to be his light in the world.

Secondly, both salt and light operate by associating with the thing that they want to change. Salt cannot improve the food unless it goes into the food and changes it from within. But salt only produces its effect when it is totally

merged with the food. It is indistinguishable from the rest of the food but its presence or absence is very obvious. Light cannot show the way unless it encounters the darkness. Sometimes Christians think that the way to go is to keep away from getting involved with society and popular culture. But by shying away from the realities of our society and our world we might indeed be hiding our lamp under the bushel basket. To make a difference we must get up and get involved. It is like a person who went before God and said, Lord Look at my hands, they are clean. I have not done any harm and have not hurt anyone. I have done my prayers and have served you. I kept away from all who would be difficult. The Lord said, yes they are clean but they are empty. The Christian, too, can only be truly effective when he or she is fully a member of society and, at the same time, gives an unmistakable taste to that society. With light and salt the world becomes a safer and better place. It is our duty as Christians to make the world a better place.

The firefly thought, she was the sole cause of light during night time. She also thought all other creatures are ungrateful about her service. So she wanted to teach them a lesson. She decided that she wouldn't glitter any more at night time. Making the decision she hid herself in a little hole in the forest in order to hide her light from others. The Fairy of the forest saw the firefly hiding in the little hole. She approached her and asked " Oh Firefly, Why do you hide yourself in that little hole instead of flying around and showing your light ?" .The firefly said, ` Dear Fairy, as you know I am the sole source of light during night time and every one depends on my light to see each other. But nobody shows any reverence to me and they are all ungrateful about the service that I am giving to them .So I wanted to teach them a lesson by hiding in the hole. When they cannot see each other during night time without my light they will really know about the great service that I was giving to them until this day " "Oh little fire fly" the Fairy said, " don't be such a fool, but come out of that little hole and look unto heaven and tell me what you are seeing on the sky", the Fairy said. Hearing that, the firefly came out of the hole and looked unto the sky where she saw the brightened moon and the numerous stars showering their light to the earth. That made her really ashamed of herself. For, she was seeing the moon and the stars for the first time in her life. For in her life because of her great pride she had never looked unto the sky and seen other luminous bodies like the Moon and the stars.

Wilma Rudolf was a disaster from birth. She was a tiny premature baby, who caught pneumonia, then scarlet fever and finally polio. The polio left one leg badly crippled, with her foot twisted inward. Until the age of seven Wilma

hobbled around on metal braces. Then she asked her sister to watch while she practiced walking without braces. She kept this up every day, afraid her parents might discover what she was doing, and she would have to stop. Eventually, feeling guilty, she told her doctor, who was flabbergasted. However, he gave her permission to continue as she was, but only for a short period of time. Wilma worked at it until she was able to throw away her crutches for good. She progressed to running and by the time she was sixteen she won a bronze medal in a relay race in the Melbourne Olympics. Four years later in the Rome Olympics, she became the first woman to win three gold medals in track and field. She returned to a ticker tape welcome in the US, had a private meeting with President Kennedy, and received the Sullivan Award as the nation's top amateur athlete. – It is in facing up to the daily carrying of the cross that releases within us our full potential.

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