

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Cycle A

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time Lectionary: 73

Reading 1 [Is 58:7-10](#)

Thus says the LORD:
Share your bread with the hungry,
shelter the oppressed and the homeless;
clothe the naked when you see them,
and do not turn your back on your own.
Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your wound shall quickly be healed;
your vindication shall go before you,
and the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.
Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer,
you shall cry for help, and he will say: Here I am!
If you remove from your midst
oppression, false accusation and malicious speech;
if you bestow your bread on the hungry
and satisfy the afflicted;
then light shall rise for you in the darkness,
and the gloom shall become for you like midday.

Responsorial Psalm [Ps 112:4-5, 6-7, 8-9](#)

R. (4a) **The just man is a light in darkness to the upright.**

or:

R. **Alleluia.**

Light shines through the darkness for the upright;
he is gracious and merciful and just.
Well for the man who is gracious and lends,
who conducts his affairs with justice.

R. **The just man is a light in darkness to the upright.**

or:

R. **Alleluia.**

He shall never be moved;
the just one shall be in everlasting remembrance.
An evil report he shall not fear;
his heart is firm, trusting in the LORD.

R. **The just man is a light in darkness to the upright.**

or:

R. **Alleluia.**

His heart is steadfast; he shall not fear.
Lavishly he gives to the poor;
His justice shall endure forever;
his horn shall be exalted in glory.

R. **The just man is a light in darkness to the upright.**

or:

R. **Alleluia.**

Reading 2 [1 Cor 2:1-5](#)

When I came to you, brothers and sisters,
proclaiming the mystery of God,
I did not come with sublimity of words or of wisdom.
For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you
except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.
I came to you in weakness and fear and much trembling,
and my message and my proclamation
were not with persuasive words of wisdom,
but with a demonstration of Spirit and power,

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so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom
but on the power of God.

Alleluia [Jn 8:12](#)

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

I am the light of the world, says the Lord;
whoever follows me will have the light of life.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel [Mt 5:13-16](#)

Jesus said to his disciples:
"You are the salt of the earth.
But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned?
It is no longer good for anything
but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.
You are the light of the world.
A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden.
Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket;
it is set on a lampstand,
where it gives light to all in the house.
Just so, your light must shine before others,
that they may see your good deeds
and glorify your heavenly Father."

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I would think today's readings are some of the few that can be very obvious. Unfortunately, in our "modern day" world and its drumbeat to reject everything that is simple or require us to reach outside of ourselves, we might be tempted to just not get it or more tragically, deliberately ignore the message. The themes of Salt and Light are skillfully connected to some rather direct obligations for each of us. We are to be that Salt and the Light, just like those seated next to us or behind us or to the front of us. We Catholics more than any other Christian Sect, need to be Salt and Light by virtue of genuinely being Christ's Body in the world. Never has the time been more ready for us to be the instruments of our God. Never has the time been more ready for us to bring His love and His kingdom to this place and this time. We have all we need to be successful, the love of our Father, the sacraments, the many graces and teachings. The only thing we need to bring is the will!

Tyranny and oppression still flourish in many places in this world and in less spectacular fashion closer to home. Unfairness, discrimination, and structural abuses often stare us in the face, such as long-term poverty, unemployment, homelessness and even hunger. It seems more and more people are steadfast in their own rose colored glasses and don't want to see. More and more we are encouraged by the press and those in power to be, say and do what they are as opposed to what the Lord wants us to be. As these injustices continue year after year they become part of the fabric of society. We be dulled by one or two pictures of pain, suffering or fear and the opportunity dulls our minds and hearts so we ignore it. They become invisible. Society says and we pick up the errant thought process that those in poverty are lazy, or that those who are homeless want to be that way, or those in war should do something or those who are abused somehow enjoy being victims or those who are without work aren't doing what needs to be done. This "modern day" rhetoric flies in the face of our call of Baptism. The whole of scripture in one way or another states the longings in our collective hearts to be valued by everyone around us. However, and this is the true point of the readings today, we need to fashion our response as Jesus teaches us. In this as always a "no" response is not a valid option. Christ invites us all into solidarity with people in dire need. How seriously do we take his challenge to be Salt of the earth and shine some Light in our world is how we will be judged at the end of our days.

If we step back many years, we heard the words - "We are not here to guard a museum but to tend a flourishing garden of life." With those words Pope John XXIII opened the Second Vatican Council. Two very strong images for the Church, aren't they? A museum and a garden. Curators and gardeners. Dusting, labeling, cataloging versus planting. Do either of these sets of images fit your experience of being part of the People of God? Fast forward almost 50 years and Pope Francis has seen that the Church today lives locked up within itself, paralyzed by fears, and too far removed from problems and sufferings to be able to give flavor to modern life and offer the true light of the Gospel. The Pope has responded quickly: "We have to go to the outskirts." This pope declared: "I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the center and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures." His call is addressed to all Christians: "We cannot passively and calmly wait in our church buildings." "The Gospel tells us constantly to run the risk of a face-to-face encounter with others." The Pope wants to introduce into the Church what he calls "the culture of encounter". He's convinced that "the thing the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm ... hearts" [José Antonio Pagola]

So what do we do with the three strong images that Jesus gives us today? "You are the salt of the earth. If salt loses its flavor it has to be thrown out. You are a lamp. A lamp should be where it gives light to the whole house. You are a city on a hill, built where everyone can see it." It seems to me that our Lord's vision for us was organic and practical. He wants us to be where the action is and he wants us to get involved. Christ wants us to use our faith and to use our gifts to season the world with the taste of God. Jesus wants us to come here on Sunday with the dirt of planting seeds of justice, love, and healing under our fingernails. Museum or garden? Judging from

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the words Jesus speaks in the gospel today, I am pretty sure Jesus would prefer the latter image for his Church.

But there's something else in our Lord's images that bears heeding. You know he is always direct, straightforward. He says, "You are the salt of the earth! You are the light of the world! You are a city on the hill!" He does not say, "How would you like to be the salt of the earth; have you ever thought of yourself as a lamp on a lampstand?" Whether we like it or not; whether we think we have the time or the talent for it – we are salt and light and witness. There is no sense looking right or left, the call is for all of us individually. It is not the other 30 percent who participate every year in the BAA. It is not the other 20 percent who volunteer to get real things done in most parishes. It is in each of our job description as Christians by virtue of our Baptisms. Jesus knows that we have doubts about the things his power can do in and through us. Jesus knows, too, that we can be selfish and preoccupied with other things. Jesus knows that we sometimes like to worship at our own little altars, and that's why he says, "Salt that's lost its flavor is useless. A candle under a bushel basket is ludicrous! Folks who build their city on a hill had better be ready for visitors." It is almost like there should be a bumper sticker on every car in the parking lot - Faith: Use it or lose it!

Because we should be so wildly enthusiastic about being Light or Salt, we need to make it part of our vision and way of life. These are the new "rose colored" glasses. To me that seems to be the second part of our Lord's teaching. Being good stewards of our Catholic faith is not first about being able to explain our religion; it is about showing folks how our Catholic faith works, how it can help in everyday life. Don't get me wrong, knowing our faith is essential to shoring up or verve for the task to be Salt and Light. And because there may not be a manual about how to be salt or light or a city on a hill, knowing the scriptures and the teachings of the gift we call Church, we will have the tools to build a relationship with the Lord and each other. We will have the courage to get out there with the Lord and see what happens. But always we have to be ourselves and use the wits and the gifts God gave us, trusting that God has made us fit and ready to do what he needs us to do.

Here's a poetic thought to close about specifically the idea of Light. Maybe this will give us somewhere to start. It's from a reflection by Kent Nerburn, "Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace" (Harper San Francisco and then quoted in U. S. Catholic, December 2000.)

Light: "We are not saints, we are not heroes. Our lives are lived in the quiet corners of the ordinary. We build tiny hearth fires, sometimes barely strong enough to give off warmth. But to the person lost in the darkness, our tiny flame may be the road to safety, the path to salvation. It is not given us to know who is lost in the darkness that surrounds us or even if our light is seen. We can only know that against even the smallest of lights, darkness cannot stand. A sailor lost at sea can be guided home by a single candle. A person lost in a wood can be led to safety by a flickering flame. It is not an issue of quality or intensity or purity. It is simply an issue of the presence of light."

I have found over these past few years that the real crux of the matter is whether we trust in the Lord... or not. Whether we shoulder on or we hide in distractions. Whether we step up in the face of adversity or we entrench in past thoughts and behaviors that bottle up the gifts only we have to give, those unique gifts that only we can provide to the world today. Our choice! Amen.

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