

Homily of the 5th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year A

Jesus says in today's Gospel, "You are the salt of the earth." Salt is very essential to human's health. Lack of it adversely affects the functioning of body cells, nerves, muscles and bones. Salt is used to season food in order to enhance flavor and taste. Before the invention of fridges and freezers, salt was an important preserving agent. It is widely believed that salt was the oldest method of food preservation. Salt has played a great role in medicine since the beginning of humankind. Salt is used for cleaning, washing, sanitizing, purifying, and disinfecting. Seeing the importance of salt to humanity, we can easily understand why Jesus calls his followers "salt of the earth."

The Bible gives a good example of the purifying power of salt: *"Once the inhabitants of the city complained to Elisha, 'The site of the city is fine indeed, as my lord can see, but the water is bad and the land unfruitful.' 'Bring me a new bowl,' Elisha said, 'and put salt in it.' When they had brought it to him, he went out to the spring and threw salt into it, saying, 'Thus says the Lord, 'I have purified this water. Never again shall death or miscarriage spring from it.' And the water has stayed pure even to this day, just as Elisha prophesied"* (2King 2:19-22).

About himself Jesus says in John 8:12 (today's Gospel Acclamation), "I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will have the light of life." About us Jesus says, "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" (today's Gospel reading). It is very striking that what Jesus says about himself, he also says about us: "I am the light of the world." "You are the light of the world." He says about himself, "I am the life" (John 11:25, 14:6). He says about us, "Whoever follows me will have the light of life." Therefore, we are supposed to be reflections of the glory of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). We are supposed to be fragrance of Christ (2 Corinthians 2:15). Christ is our head, and we are supposed to be his body (Colossians 1:18). We are supposed to be ambassadors of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). The Catechism of the Catholic Church (No. 2782) states, "By Baptism, God incorporates us in the Body of his Christ; through the anointing of his Spirit who flows from the head to the members, he makes us other 'Christs.'" What inexplicable and unmeritorious privileges and honors we are supposed to have!

The first reading reminds us how we can be salt of the earth and light of life to the world; or as the second reading puts it, how we can demonstrate Spirit and power: Feed the hungry, shelter the oppressed and homeless, cloth the naked, and attend to the afflicted. These are only a few examples of various works of mercy we are called to undertake. We will not be able to engage faithfully in works of mercy if we lack qualities of salt and light enumerated above.

Right before us are those in need of our help; and those in need of our love, care and support. They are the elderly, the lonely, the sick, the troubled, the grieving, the hungry, the deprived, the incapacitated, the wounded, the oppressed, the heartbroken, the poor, the abandoned and so on. For some of these people, life is tasteless. Some of them see only darkness and hopelessness around them all the time. We do not have to go far to meet these needy people. They are around us in our homes, in our communities, in our parish, in our work places, and in our neighborhood. We have lost our saltiness and our flame when we have become numb to other people's afflictions and sufferings. We are mandated, therefore, today to go and be salt and light to the needy in one way or another.

God has given us the Spirit, the power, and the light. May we fan into flame these gifts of God, and so bring light to those in darkness, bring hope to the hopeless, bring healing to the sick and relief to the burdened. May we not lose the divine honor of being channels of God's graces in our world. Amen.

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