

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
(Isaiah 58:7-10 / Matthew 5:13-16)
09.02.2014

You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world

It seems undeniable that sometimes our familiarity with the Scriptures renders us numb to the strength and the boldness of some of its statements. This is particularly true about Jesus' words today in our Gospel reading.

Allow me to repeat what we have just heard: "You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world". Jesus does not say: "You may be, or you will be the salt of the earth and the light of the world". No, very clearly he says: "You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world".

This is quite an amazing affirmation regarding our identity, who we are in God's eyes. Are we all really, or even remotely, aware of the consequences of Jesus' words? Do we appreciate what should be their impact on the way we look at ourselves and at one another?

We are not only created beings: fish and cows are too. According to St Paul, in a unique and definitive way, "we are God's offspring" (Ac 17:28-29). As Jesus declares in the Gospel of St John: "We are born from above" (3:3). God is not only near to us, but we are related to him as kin. As the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* puts it, we are "constitutively related to God in the most profound manner" (n° 108).

In our Churches we have been very keen on reminding people that they are sinners and that they are living in a dark world. And yet the question is: are we as keen when it is on reminding them that they are the salt of the earth and the light of the world?

As Christians, we may sometimes give the impression that all things began with the sin of Adam and Eve. Everything seems to be seen through the lens of this dramatic step in our relationship with God. However as dramatic as it was – and still is – we must remember that before the Fall, God created us in his image and likeness, and that nothing can erase this trace of God within us.

Yes it is true that we have been made from dust, but it was dust from paradise and so there are in our very nature some specks of the dust of heaven!

The point is not to deny the grave consequences of the first sin in our lives but to remember that with Christ we are restored to God's plan and intention for each one of us.

We are loved and desired by a God who longs for us (Cf. Jb 14:15). As an echo to Job, St Bernard says to his brothers: "The very Creator of the angels himself is waiting for you (...). The Father is waiting and longing for you" (*Serm.* Christmas Eve 2:7). Do we really believe that we are loved and desired by God because we are precious? Do we really look at ourselves in the way God looks at us? Do we see that we are the light of the world and the salt of the earth?

Great is our dignity and just as great is our responsibility!

According to Jesus' words, our mission is not just confined to our small community or to our denomination. We are accountable to nothing less than the world and the earth. We are responsible for the world and for the earth. As Christians we have to be careful not to become too petty in our preoccupations, too parochial, too self-concerned. It is clear that our mission begins with our next door neighbour and yet we should broaden our hearts and minds to the whole world. What is happening today to any man or woman throughout the world is not alien to you and me: through God who is the Father of all, we are connected to our brothers and sisters in Syria, in Ukraine, in the remote corners of Tibet or Polynesia.

This commissioning could be frightening and daunting if it were only about us, if we were called to bring our light into the world. We would literally work ourselves to death. But we have to

remember Jesus' words: "The kingdom of God is within you" (Lk 17:21). And it is a Kingdom of light, a Kingdom which gives taste and meaning to life.

Addressing each one of us, Pope Francis writes: "My mission of being in the heart of the people is not just a part of my life or a badge I can take off (...). It is something I cannot uproot from my being without destroying my very self. I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world. We have to regard ourselves as sealed, even branded, by this mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing" (*Evangelii*, n° 273).

Unless we are afraid or unless we choose to be complacent or lazy, we have no reason to shy away from our responsibility. All human hearts – ours included – are craving for Christ's light, a light which brings compassion and meaning, a light which comforts and strengthens.

We have to pray that we may reclaim our true identity for our good and for the good of the whole world. Pope Francis is clear, if we reject our mission not only do we deprive the world from Christ's light but we hurt our very self too. As St Peter reminds us we "are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart to sing the praises of God who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1P 2:9).