

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
(Isaiah 58:7-10 / Matthew 5:13-16)
05.02.2023

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

Dear brothers and sisters,

Every day, we are bombarded with news through newspapers, television, cell phones or laptops. Most of the time, these news stories convey bad news. It is very rare to hear some good or uplifting news. If there are good news stories, very often they are barely reported and quickly passed over. The fact is that bad news is more flamboyant and satisfies our curiosity more readily than a humble and noiseless account of good news; in other words, there is a wider market for bad news than for good news in the media world.

But have you heard today's gospel passage? Jesus has just said to us: "You are the salt of the earth". You are the light of the world! Is this not good news, indeed amazing good news? We are, each one of us is, here and now, the salt of the earth. We are, each one of us is, here and now, the light of the world.

Yes, brothers and sisters, **we are the salt of the earth**. What does this mean? If salt is used to give taste to insipid food or to preserve food from decay, this means that we are called to give taste to what is tasteless in our ordinary lives. We are called to preserve our ordinary lives from despair and death.

We are the salt of the earth, because -through baptism- we are members of the body of Christ, we are one with Christ.

As a consequence we are entitled to say with assurance to those who fear death: 'Do not fear', because with Christ death is no longer a meaningless end, but a passage toward fullness of life, towards true and eternal life.

We are entitled to say to those who are overburdened by the weight of sin that, if they repent, their sins are forgiven by Christ's passion and death on the Cross.

We are entitled to say to those who are sick that they are not alone, that Christ is walking the path of life with them, I mean the com-passionate Christ (literally the Christ suffering with them). Christ is there to teach them how to manage to live with their suffering, without allowing the pain they endure to submerge and overwhelm them.

It befalls us to tell those who find themselves in situations which leave them hopeless that the Lord is with them, always ready to open a future of life in front of them. Hope in the Lord and you will not be disappointed.

When Jesus tells us that we are the salt of the earth, this really is good news and it is an honour, but it is also a duty, a duty which can be heavy sometimes; a duty which is exacting and requires courage on our behalf.

In the gospel passage we have just heard, Jesus tells us also that **we are the light of the world**. In John's gospel (9,5), Jesus says: "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world". So,

when Jesus tells us that we are the light of the world, he requires of us nothing less than to be like Himself. He demands of us to be another Christ, a sign of his presence in the world today.

How can we be the light of the world? The answer to that question is found in the gospel passage that we have just heard. “Your light must shine in the sight of men and women, so that seeing **your good works**, they may give the praise to your Father in heaven”. We are the light of the world through our good works.

What does Jesus mean by “good works”? By “good works”, Jesus does not mean works which are good in quality, in the sense of perfect which might ever imply at times an element of hardness, coldness or austerity to them. By “good works”, what Jesus means are works which are attractive. In other words, it is not question of a goodness which repels, but a goodness which attracts. In true Christian goodness, there is a certain charm; it is not the perfection of flawlessness, but the perfection of an attractive merciful love. Our good works must give to others the desire to do the same: to show by their good works that they also follow Christ.

Such is the kind of light we are called to be. We were reminded many times by the late Pope Benedict and by Pope Francis that the Church does not grow by imposing its truth upon others, but by attracting others to the truth of the gospel. The Church does not impose the truth of the gospel, but proposes it in an attractive and attracting way. Goodness always shines, it attracts; it makes a difference.

The prophet Isaiah in our first reading reminded us that ordinary acts of generosity towards a neighbour can cast light all around us. Good works announce the presence of God in the world. Let me quote the prophet: “Share your bread with the hungry, and shelter the homeless poor, clothe the man you see to be naked... Then will your light shine like the dawn.” Or again: “If you give your bread to the hungry and relief to the oppressed, your light will rise in the darkness, and your shadows become like noon”.

Today’s gospel passage tells us also that the good works which we are called to practice are not meant to draw attention to ourselves, but to God, our heavenly Father. Those who see them are meant to be attracted towards our heavenly Father, not us! We are called to love as God loves us. Our good works are the light of the world, the light which turns the world towards the Father and to his good will.

May the Lord accords us the grace to be the salt of the earth, to give savour to what is insipid in the world through our words inspired by the Lord’s Word, and to be the light of the world through our good actions which enlighten the lives of those with whom we live today.