

A – Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Isaiah 58:7-10
Psalm: 112: The just man is a light in darkness to the upright.
Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 2:1-5
Gospel: Matthew 5:13-16

Sharing Jesus Christ. Because of the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord last Sunday, we skipped the well-known opening lines of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, the Beatitudes. In the Beatitudes, nine times Jesus proclaimed blessed the people who live according to these radical attitudes – attitudes in relation to God: *blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are you when you are persecuted and insulted because of me*, and attitudes in relation to neighbor: *blessed are the merciful, blessed are the peacemakers*.

The Beatitudes are not empty pronouncements. Rather they are serious invitations to every Christian to live the very life of Jesus Christ. And exactly in living the life of Jesus do we find the answers to important existential questions we must ask of ourselves: **Who am I? Why am I here?** Jesus, using simple images from everyday, plainly tells you and me, “*You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.*” So what are the images of salt and light telling us about ourselves as followers of Jesus?

Discovering Jesus Christ. First image, salt. Salt, by itself, is just salty. But when added to something bland, it brings out the flavor in food, and therefore, salt allows the food to be better enjoyed. In Leviticus 2:13, God even instructed the Israelites that salt must accompany the grain that they offer to Him. This is so because salt enhances the flavor of the food; it also cleanses or purifies whatever it touches. In 2 Kings 2:20, the prophet Elisha threw salt in the water and on the land in order to take away death and to bring life to the city of Jericho. Even now, people ask me to bless salt that they sprinkle around their houses to cleanse and to bless their homes.

We are the salt of the earth. The earth, according to Jesus, needs salt in order to bring out its flavor, and to bring it life. Of course, before we can make such positive

difference in the lives of others, we first must be aware of the positive difference that Jesus makes in our lives. And so we reflect: *Is your relationship with Jesus personal? [Sharing your faith with your children at different stages in their life] In happy and joyful times, do you find him laughing with you? In difficult and trying times, do you find him carrying you through? In a world that can get really noisy, do you quiet yourself so as to listen to his voice, in prayer and in reading the gospels? Do you do what Jesus tells you, even when it goes against your initial instincts? If you have become a better person because of Jesus, does this motivate for you to share Jesus with others? Through you, does Jesus bring out the good in others? Through you, does Jesus make others enjoy their lives more?*

Second image: light. In the first story of creation, what was the first thing that God created? Light! Light is necessary for us to see and appreciate God's creation. God wants us to see and appreciate creation because He sees it as good, and part of this created order includes you and me. We know that there was trouble in paradise when Adam and Eve, because of their pride and disobedience, hid from God. They cannot bear to be in the light. Yet God sought to find them so that His light may dispel their darkness, and so convince them of their goodness.

We are the light of the world. Jesus specifies that our light is our good works. When we do good works, we restore the world to what God originally intended it to be, a paradise! Again, we reflect: *When a friend is into drugs, do you tell and show him that it is not worth it? When your children are keeping God at bay, do you find out why and, with compassion, share with them your own faith journey? When your family is going through tough times, do you look up to the family Jesus, Mary and Joseph for strength and guidance? When your marriage seems to be stretched to the limit, do you seek to discover new ways of loving? Here, Mother Teresa might say to us, "We are not to expect people and the situations around us to be perfect, rather we must do our best to help people and transform the situations around us to become and be perfect."*

Following Jesus Christ. We now live in a time when the older generation might say, “*The world has become more secular and hostile to faith and religion.*” Whereas the younger generation might say, “*Well, we have only known the world as it is.*” In a way, both sentiments are right: nowadays, faith and religion are pushed more and more into the corner, away from public life. The world, when understood as an entity that rejects God, simply cannot know any better. The world is simply behaving as is expected: the world being the world. But we, on our part, must not lose track of the tasks that Jesus has entrusted to us as salt of the earth and light of the world.

Yesterday morning I was at Holy Cross and helped with their First Penance. There were fifty children and many parents and grandparents received the sacrament. A lady came in, struggling to get rid of the bitterness she has towards her father who had had been very abusive to her mother. Her father had been dead for several years and, sadly, the predominant memories that he left to his daughter are bad memories.

For us, Christians, there is one tragedy that I hope we never find ourselves in: to have lived without being nurtured by a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Without being nurtured by Jesus Christ, we, the Church, are no different from the world. Without being nurtured by Jesus Christ, we cease to be salt of the earth and light of the world.

I hope that when we die, we leave our children, grandchildren and friends with enough good memories to remember us by. These good memories are and will be concrete signs that we are leaving the world behind a better and much blessed place: having brought out a little more of its good flavor and having vanquished some of its darkness with the light of Christ.

Fr. Edison Tayag