

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday per Annum - A  
Isaiah 58:78-10;  
I Corinthians 2:1-5;  
Matthew 5:13-16  
Little Flower - 2/5/23

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's Gospel is a continuation of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. In today's Gospel, Jesus told his disciples that they were the salt of the earth and the light of the world. We can identify with both images.

Salt both preserves and flavors food. If we are going to be the salt of the earth, we, as individuals and as a community, have to be faithful to the unchanging and unchangeable teachings of Jesus, and we have to share those teachings fully and faithfully with others as St. Paul did. As he wrote to the Corinthians, "*For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*" At the same time, if we are going to be the salt of the earth, we are called to bring out the best in others and to work to humanize the world, i.e. to make the world a better place for all people, not just for the people of today but also for the people of tomorrow.

Fr. Aelred Cody captured these two meanings of salt in the opening sentence that began his article on the foundation of the Church: "Among the constant, necessary concerns of all committed members of the Church is that of remaining faithful to our origins and to the purpose for which we exist, while adapting ourselves institutionally and individually to the requirements of our own times." Several times in the last few weeks I have mentioned divisions in the Church. Although divisions in the church are bad, just as salt has two functions, Fr. Aelred suggests that there is a tension in the Church that is both good and necessary. This is the tension between the Church's origins and purpose and the requirements of our own times.

In today's Gospel, Jesus also calls us to be the light of the world. If our light shines before others, they will see our good deeds and glorify our heavenly Father. Christ, of course, is the one true light of the world, but he can only shine as brightly as we are willing to be Christian lights in the world. If we respond to Jesus' invitation to be lights to the world, we will bring Christ into the lives of others and brings others to Christ and God.

The question is what does it mean to be lights to the world. Today's reading from Isaiah also deals with the image of light. The universal norm of morality is to do good and avoid evil. The so-called golden and silver rules are to treat others as we want to be treated and not treat others as we would not want to be treated. According to Isaiah, if we do positive good to others, especially those in need, if we treat them the way we would want to be treated, if we avoid evil, if we avoid treating people in ways we would not want to be treated, our light will break forth like the dawn.

According to Isaiah, if we are lights to the world, this will impact not only others but also ourselves. First, the wounds of sin within us will be healed. In other words, God will forgive us and empower us to live richer, fuller lives. Also, we ourselves will live in the light, and even gloom will become like midday, which I think means we shall find true happiness.

My brothers and sisters, today's second reading suggests that as bold as Paul was, he was also humble. He writes that he came in weakness and that his message and proclamation were not made with persuasive words of wisdom but with a demonstration of Spirit and power. This suggests to me that church leaders and church members need to be humble. Both as leaders and members, we need to listen to one another respectfully. However, we also need to listen respectfully to non-Catholics, non-Christians, non-believers, agnostics, and even atheists. Only if we do will we be able to witness effectively to the Spirit and power of God within and among us. Before we can witness, we have to listen.