

9th February 2020 (5th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)

Isaiah 58:7-10; Psalm 111(112):4-9; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; Matthew 5:13-16.

Salt and light to the world!

Christians, re-born in Christ through baptism (immersion) into the death and resurrection of Jesus, have an important mission: to give glory to God the Father. This is a continuation of the mission of Jesus, whose main mission was to give glory to the Father! How do we live up to our mission?

In the gospel according to Matthew, immediately before today's gospel passage, is the passage about the beatitudes, where Jesus declares blessed those who empty and humble themselves to allow God to take over their life. They are the ones who find God here on earth, and in all his fullness, in heaven. We did not read the gospel of the beatitudes last Sunday, because, instead, we celebrated the feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple.

What do Christians who live by the beatitudes look like? These Christians are like salt and light to those around them!

In the time of Jesus, salt was a very important commodity; it had two uses. Like today, salt was used to enhance the taste of the food being served. More importantly, at a time without the technology of refrigeration, salt was used to preserve food to make it last longer.

What would happen if the salt does not remain pure but is mixed up with other impurities? It loses its salinity and its effectiveness, rendering it useless. Especially in the case of preserving food, if the salt is not salty enough, then, instead of preserving the food, it will be ruined! The only thing left to do with such salt is to throw it away.

Salt that is thrown on the ground has a very adverse effect. Instead of giving taste and life, it brings death. Salt kills vegetation, rendering the ground sterile. In the time of Jesus, salt was used as a weed killer, it was thrown on the footpath leading to the house, so that the footpath remains nice and weed free! Here it is trodden underfoot by everyone who uses the footpath!

Christians are called to give taste to the world around us, bringing God to it. Christians who lose their taste by not living according to the gospel values, are useless Christians and bring death, not life, to those around them!

The second image is that of light. Without light one cannot see. Light shines on objects around us and enables us to see and appreciate them. The city of Jerusalem sat on top of a hill, and when the temple was illuminated on certain feast days, it became a symbol of light to the world. Similarly, one does not hide a light source under a table, but puts on a table or on a stand, on high, where it can be seen and be effective.

Christians are called to shine their light onto the world. The role of Christians is to help the world to see and appreciate the gifts it has received. We cannot be salt and light simply by spending time in a church building. Prayer, adoration and meditation is important to help Christians grow and be energised; the Christians' true mission is to go out and live in the world, immersed in its secular culture, to be able to give taste to the world and shine a light on God in today's world.

God is incarnating himself every day in the world around us. In Bethlehem he was born a simple little babe unknown and unrecognised. Today he is still being born unknown and unrecognised, in our modern secular world. Our role, like the role of the star leading the magi, is to shine a light so that God can be seen and recognised. We cannot isolate ourselves from the world, rather we need to be fully immersed in the world and its culture so that our presence becomes light and salt to all around us.

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