

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2011

If the question is asked of us about what it means to be a Christian, many answers can be given. Whatever the variety of answers, however, one thing can be said with certainty, namely, that to be a Christian is to believe in God, to confess him as our creator and redeemer, and to act accordingly.

This statement justifies everything we do on a regular basis like prayer, the participation in the holy mass or the reception of the other sacraments, etc. This statement, however, would be incomplete if it overlooked the practical and social dimension of our profession of faith. That is exactly what the readings of this Sunday try to remind us by focusing on the Christian social duties we have to fulfill in society and toward our brothers and sisters.

In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah tells the people of Israel that prayer and worship, though important, are not enough if they neglect the social concerns toward the poor and the needy. Therefore, they have to share their bread with the hungry, to provide shelter to the oppressed and the homeless, to clothe the naked and to get rid of selfishness. If they act in such a way, God will bless them in time of their needs, protect them in time of adversity and heal all their wounds. Moreover, their light will shine in darkness and their prayer will be heard by the Lord.

What is behind this text is the idea that our worship of God, as wonderful as it might be, would be lacking of charity if it was not accompanied by a social concern. The text also brings to our awareness the fact that the fundamental philosophy of Christian life is sharing. If that is the case, then, we understand why the Church deals with social questions in its social teaching, as well as it insists on the social duties we have to perform as Christians toward our fellow citizens.

All that is confirmed by the Gospel of this Sunday as Jesus invites us to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. These two elements had a big significance in the time of Jesus, which we have to rediscover today as we read the Gospel.

First, let us talk about the salt. Salt was connected with purity, preservation and flavoring of food. When we look just at its whiteness, we can understand why Jesus says that we have to be the salt of the earth. In fact, one of the characteristics of our world is its lowering of the standards of life. As Christians, we have to stand in the world as the people of moral standards of purity in everything we think, say and do by our honesty, diligence, conscientiousness, respect of others, love of truth, etc.

The salt was also used to preserve food from corruption and putrefaction. Even today, in Africa, where people do not have a refrigerator and freezer, they still use salt in order to keep things from spoiling. When Jesus uses this word, he wants us to be, by our presence, the ones who prevent things to go bad, to be corrupted, to die and to be lost.

Moreover, what would a food be without salt? Those who have a medical condition know well that it becomes insipid and sometimes tasteless. If the salt loses its saltiness, it is just useless. That is why as Christians we have to be the people who make a difference in the lives of others in the world.

That being said, Jesus wants us also to be the light of the world. Each one of us can easily understand the meaning of the light. A light is something which is above all to be seen. When Jesus says that we are the light of the world, he wants us to be visible in the world and not only in the Church. Our influence in the world should be made visible by the way we deal with the important problems affecting our society and our world.

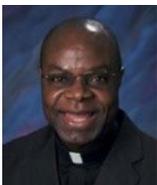
Like the road light that is used to regulate the traffic or the warning light at the estuary of a river, or a light that is used to lighten a house, as Christians, we have to be the ones who make the way clear to others. We have to be those who help others to reach their security by putting their lives into God's hands. We have to be those who warn others about the risk they are running, especially the youngest, so that they may not lose their way to eternal life.

When we would have done all that, we should never forget that it is for the glory of God and not for our own. In other words, we should never do goodness in order to attract the attention on us, but always for the glory of God. Otherwise, we have paid ourselves through what we have done and, in that case, we prevent God from rewarding us when the time will come. That is why we should never think of what we have done, but rather of what God has enabled us to do for his glory.

That spirit of humility and effacement is what we find in St Paul. He came to the Corinthians in simplicity, fear and trembling. He did not rely on human achievements as he brought them the Gospel, but rather on God alone. After all, faith rests not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

Let us ask the Lord the grace of having always present before our eyes the double structure of our faith, namely the relationship with God and the relationship with our fellows. Let us ask him the courage to fulfill our spiritual duties toward him without neglecting our social duties toward others. May he give us the courage to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world for the glory of his name! God bless you all!

Isaiah 58, 7-10; 1 Corinthians 2, 1-5; Matthew 5, 13-16



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