

## **FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

*Gospel: Matthew 5:13-16*

Jesus said to his disciples:

“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp-stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

### **REFLECTION 1: BEING THE SALT OF THE EARTH**

If you were christened before Vatican 2 - say before 1965 or so, the celebrant of the ceremony would have placed some salt on your tiny lips and uttered words in Latin, 'Accipe sal sapientia,' - Receive this salt, the sign of wisdom, may it help you towards eternal life'. While blessing the salt, the priest would have said 'Almighty God . . . drive from this child N.N. all blindness of heart, break every snare of Satan that held him (her), open to him (her) the door of your mercy. And may he (she) under the symbol of salt taste the savor of your wisdom, be seasoned against all unwholesome desires and in the joy and fragrance of your people serve you and your Church and grow in grace from day to day'.

Centuries before Jesus the Psalmist invited his contemporaries to 'taste and see that the Lord is good' (Psalm 34). Tasting and seeing refer to the knowledge that has been gained through experience, as distinct from the knowledge we might gain through reading. So when Jesus addresses his disciples in today's Gospel as 'You are the salt of the earth', he was charging each of his followers to be the kind of person in whom others could actually taste and experience the goodness of the Lord. In other words Jesus called his own to live in such a way so that others could come through them to a personal knowledge and experience of the saving presence of Christ in their lives. The Roman scholar Pliny the Elder who died about 40 years after the resurrection of Jesus, wrote, 'There is nothing more useful than sunlight and salt'. People at that time thought that without a careful balance of salt and light, living things couldn't function or grow. Salt as we know seasons and preserves, so by addressing Jesus' followers in these terms of salt and light, integrity in both word and deed were necessary for the proper growth of his kingdom.

In our first reading the Prophet Isaiah explored these acts whereby people could dispel the darkness of their world, savouring its essence. It would be to 'share their bread with the hungry, sheltering the homeless poor and clothing the naked', and so gain credibility through their witness and action. Jesus also, in today's Gospel, talks of salt that loses its flavour (Matt. 5: 13). Impossible you might say, salt always holds its own. Strange, but archaeologists have discovered that in ancient times the ordinary oven for cooking was placed out of doors and was built of stone on a base of tiles. In such ovens, in order to retain the heat, a bed of salt was laid under the tiled floor. After a certain length of time the salt perished – the tiles were taken up and the salt removed and thrown on the rubbish heap – it had lost its power to heat the tiles. So what Jesus was saying to us in that remark is that uselessness is a disaster. If Christians are not fulfilling their purpose as Christians then they are on the way to nowhere. We are meant to be salt of the earth and if we do not bring to life the power and radiance that we ought, we lead pointless lives. Salt preserves food from corruption, it also brings out its flavour and makes it more pleasant and it disappears into food. We Christians should do the same among the people around us. Wouldn't it be nice if people were to say of us on the day of our funeral – 'John/Mary was the salt of the earth!'

### **REFLECTION 2: SALT AND LIGHT**

Centuries before Jesus, the Psalmist invited his contemporaries to 'taste and see that the Lord is good'. It is now found in the Bible as Psalm 34. Tasting and seeing refer to that knowledge that has been gained

through experience, as distinct from knowledge we might gain from books. So when Jesus addressed his disciples in today's Gospel as 'salt of the earth and light of the world' he was charging each of his followers to be the kind of person(s) in whom others could actually taste and experience the goodness of the Lord. In other words, Jesus called his own to live in such a way that others could come through them to a personal knowledge and experience of the saving presence of God in their lives.

The Roman scholar Pliny the elder who died about 40 Years after the Resurrection of Jesus, wrote, 'Nil utilius sole et sale' which means, there is nothing more useful than sunlight and salt. You see, people at that time thought that without a careful balance of salt and light, living things could not function or grow. Salt seasons and preserves, so that by addressing his followers in these terms, of salt and light, Jesus made it known that fateful commitment to him, integrity in both word and deed, were necessary for the proper growth of his Kingdom i.e. the ideal life here on this planet.

In our First Reading the Prophet Isaiah explored these actions by which people could experience God's light and dispel the darkness of their world. It would be 'to share their bread with the hungry, to shelter the homeless poor and to clothe the naked'. These are, according to the Prophet, activities that produce light. They were letting their light shine before others. As Pope Francis put it: 'gaining credibility through the witness of action'.

The story is told about an Irish eye surgeon who used to give up two weeks of his annual leave to work in a small hospital in West Africa. His main task was to remove cataracts from the eyes of the many whose vision had been affected by this affliction. In a simple operation he had restored to thousands a clear vision that had been absent for so long in their lives. He remarked on his return; 'Never have I seen such joy in peoples' faces and happiness in their families. I felt so grateful to be able to use my talents in this way. Their gratitude was the best of payments'. Of such are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.