

Isaiah 58:7–10
 Psalm 12:4–9
 1 Corinthians 2:1–5
 Matthew 5:13–16
 Homily for 5th Sunday of Ordinary Time
 February 4th -5th

“We are reflected Light”

Today we hear Jesus say:

"You are the light of the world. . . ."

Now if you have been in the Church for any length of time, the words of Jesus can lose their impact because we have heard them repeatedly. But just think for a minute about the people to whom Jesus is saying this ! Just think of this motley crew of farmers and fishermen and tax collectors and housewives in a tiny and remote village in an obscure part of the world and Jesus was saying to them, "You are the light of the world." Talk about a statement of faith! Let's go farther than that. Talk about a crazy idea! Light of the world? That bunch? It must have sounded absurd at the time even to them. Only Jesus could have seen that through this group of misfits that God would indeed change the world forever. At the time, however, it probably sounded like so much idle chatter. "You are the light of the world," he said and so they were. Now do you want to hear something really absurd?

So are we.

Jesus says to us this that WE are the light of the world. Think about that for a moment. Sink your teeth into it savour it. You and I are the light of the world. What does it mean? It means Jesus want us to shine like a city set on a hill.

To take to heart what this means will help us to more fully realize that:

1. We Have a Responsibility to the World
2. We Have Something the World Desperately Needs
3. We Are Not the Source of Our Light, but We Reflect a Much Greater Light:

1. We have a responsibility for the world: This is the theme that comes through so clearly in our Old Testament reading from Isaiah where the corporal acts of mercy, especially the act of care for the poor is emphasized. Notice that it is tangible expressions of generosity to those who are most in need that is emphasized. Here is expressed a specific way we are responsible for the world.

*Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?*

Here is the expression of very practical care being extended to those in need of the basics of life. When Christians live like this, the light, Jesus says we are as His followers, will be manifested in a special way.

*8Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you,
the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.*

*9Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.*

Such corporal acts of mercy become the means by which the light of Jesus Christ is made visible. As we extend mercy, we will in turn be more aware of God's mercy. Notice how this is to be the Christian's response to such suffering, rather than something else Isaiah says:

*If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,*

Here is expressed the Yoke of Judgement, pointing the finger of condemnation at those who are suffering. When people of faith act like this there is no way our light can shine. But when in mercy we exercise our responsibility to the world, what a difference we can make.

Let me illustrate this in the following way.

As Catholics we have a particular concern about the sanctity of life. To that end we understand abortion to be a moral evil that is a violation of the commandment: "Thou shall not murder". The Church has to always proclaim, in the words of the Vatican II document, *Gaudium et Spes*:

God, the Lord of life, has entrusted to men the noble mission of safeguarding life, and men must carry it out in a manner worthy of themselves. Life must be protected with the utmost care from the moment of conception: abortion and infanticide are abominable crimes¹

While the Church sees the seriousness of this moral evil, the Church is also called to be merciful. So for instance, if a person who has had an abortion is truly sorry for this sin, and wants to make amendment of life, a priest can pronounce absolution and restore this person to the fold of Christ.

¹ Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed., p. 548). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

Here in Calgary, there is a home called Elizabeth House. This is a residence run by the Diocese for teenage mothers who make the courageous decision to keep their babies. Elizabeth House not only cares for these mom's and babies, but supports these young women with education so that with time the hope is they can establish themselves in their own homes.

This year our St. Peter's Knight's of Columbus is going to be actively involved in Elizabeth House. News will be coming when there are opportunities for your participation in projects like a garden to be planted in the spring and refurbishing of the back yard.

Here is the point. As Catholics we have a responsibility to always and everywhere speak out against the evil of abortion because it is murder. However, we also have to do everything we can to extend the mercy of God through the sacrament of confession and reconciliation and help support those young women who choose to do the right thing by having their babies. When this happens, then in the words of Isaiah, we are not pointing the finger, but taking to heart this particular area of responsibility to the world.

Not only are we to be motivated to understand our responsibility to the world, we are also to be motivated to see we have something the world needs. Jesus says that not only are we the light of the world, but also the salt of the earth. What is important about salt? In the ancient world it was a preservative for food.

As the Church, Jesus says we are to have this same influence. There is a wonderful verse in Colossians 4.6 where Paul relates this preservative dimension to our speech.

Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt,

There are times when our speech has to address matters that preserve the integrity of the Church's teaching.

Let me illustrate this with the following story.

Last month at the Chapter Meeting of the Knight's of Columbus, held at St. Cecilia's Parish, an announcement was made that St. Mary's University is to receive a grant from the Liberal Government for \$400,000.² Now some might say, what is wrong with that? Tax dollars going to a good cause, is not this what our tax dollars are for? But this is not just regular university funding. This is grant money that is directly earmarked for St. Mary's from the Liberal Government. This is a government that has explicitly stated that to be in the Caucus you have to be pro-choice and if you adhere to the Catholic Church's moral teaching you cannot be a Liberal MP.³ This is a government that explicitly exercises policy contrary to the teaching of the Catholic Church. Our Grand Knight, Angelo, our Deputy Grand Knight, Theo and I were so

² See <http://www.stmu.ca/st-marys-university-receives-infrastructure-funding-government-canada/>

³ See <http://news.nationalpost.com/news/canada/canadian-politics/justin-trudeau-clarifies-that-anti-abortion-liberal-incumbents-would-be-forced-to-vote-pro-choice>

concerned about this that we sent a letter to the Board of St. Mary's University, expressing our concern that as a private Catholic University, they were going to receive special funding from a government that is principally opposed to the teaching of the Catholic Church. This letter was supported by Father Jerome, our pastor.

The letter was written in a gracious manner but was very clear in stating the conflict of interest between being St. Mary's Catholic University, receiving money from Prime Minister Trudeau's Liberal Government.

Jesus says that if the Church loses her saltiness, that is this work of preserving speech, what are we useful for in the end? We are called to be engaged, to always be gracious but our language needs to be seasoned with salt. This is language the world needs and is language, I believe, we need to caringly speak even to Catholic institutions where they are losing their saltiness because of accommodation to the values of the world.

So we are the Light of the World. But let's be clear that we are not the source of our light, just as the moon is not the source of its lights. Ours is a reflected light that when we are turned ever more to Jesus Christ and the magisterial teaching of the Catholic Church we will be able to be that city set on a hill, salt that has that preserving element. That is because just as the moon reflects the light of the sun, we are to reflect the light of the Son of God.

Aware of this, let us we take the words of the Apostle Paul to heart who said in today's reading from 1 Corinthians:

And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling; 4 and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

This is the point. It is only we are realize the power of God as work within the Body of Christ, that we can be the salt, and light the world needs.