

## Sexagesima (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday Before Lent)

Isaiah 58:7-10

1 Cor 2:1-5

Mt 5:13-16

Darkness is the absence of light, and when the lighted paschal candle dispels the darkness on the Vigil of Easter, what matters more than the people's greeting of the arrival of the light is whether the light of the resurrected Christ shines in, and through, their lives.

Isaiah made the same point to his people when they were complaining that God was not rewarding them for being observant Jews. Isaiah then spoke the unpalatable truth, that there is no point observing the ritual of their faith if their faith makes no difference to how they live. Empty words and good intentions are cheap because they pave the road to hell. It is action that is costly. Isaiah's people were focussed on themselves – what does their religious observance do for *them*, is the question he asked? Meanwhile the poor are ignored and their workers were oppressed. There must be no gap between what we believe and how we live.

St Paul had a similar issue in Corinth where he had to remind the Christian faithful that they were not in a right relationship with God just because they said they were.

In today's gospel reading, Jesus uses three images to illustrate what discipleship is. These are salt, light, and a city built on a mountaintop. Jesus described Himself as the Light of the World (Jn 8:12), and being a disciple means radiating that light that is within us, outwards to the world. At times, the light must be like a searchlight, hunting down evil in the world, or searching for the lost. At other times it can be like a lighthouse, guiding people through difficult situations until they find safety in the embrace of God in the Church. At other times it may be a lighted beacon announcing the victory of Jesus' battle over evil and drawing people to God's love and salvation. If Jesus' disciples are not radiating channels of His light, the world will live in darkness.

The Church, the new Jerusalem is called through its ordained and lay disciples to be like the old city of Jerusalem on its mountaintop. Like the Children of Israel, Christ's faithful are to draw all peoples like a magnet to embrace God's Truth and become members of His new community. Isaiah told *his* people that drawing all peoples to God was their mission, but they refused to undertake it. It is Jesus who did so, and who charged His Church to continue with it.

Then Jesus said the disciples were to be the salt of the earth. Salt seasons, it is a preservative, and essential for good health. Roman soldiers were paid in coinage but sometimes were provided with salt as part of their rations, hence the saying, 'the man is worth his salt.' People are still worth their salt when paid a salary because the Latin word for salt is 'salarium.'

In Old Testament times, salt was also used to seal a covenant between parties. Its use was a sign of the permanence of the agreement. But Jesus asks what happens to the covenant if the salt becomes useless? In a nutshell – it fractures.

“You are the salt of the earth,” Jesus told His disciples. The Church is the visible presence of the Covenant of Love between God and His people that was sealed with the blood of Jesus the Lamb. If we are not the light, the city and the salt, witnessing to the truth of the Gospel of Jesus and His Resurrection, the Covenant between God and ourselves becomes fractured.

Evangelism is not simply telling people what the good news is. The Good News of the Resurrection needs to be visible in our lives. It is only effective if there is no gap between what we say and how we live. If the gap is huge, why would people respond positively to the invitation, “Come and See?”

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