

FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

February 6, 2011

(Isaiah 58: 6-10; I Corinthians 2: 1-5; Matt. 5: 13-16)

Introduction

A famous movie actor dropped into a restaurant while passing through a small town. The waitress kept staring at him and finally asked: "Don't I know you from somewhere?" The actor was coy, and said: "You may have seen me in the movies." The waitress said: "Maybe that's it. Where do you usually sit?" You and I may not be famous people, but in today's *Gospel* Jesus tells us that as His followers we must be *salt* and *light* for our world. This is an awesome responsibility. What does it mean?

It Means Genuine Religion is not just About God and Me

When God's People returned to their own land after long years of exile in Babylon, they set about rebuilding their Temple and re-establishing their public worship. Some of them, however, became so wrapped up in getting the rituals correct, and the fast days just right, that they ignored the poor who were all around them. Hence the prophet's condemnation of their version of religion in today's *first reading*. Religion is not just *God and me*. Religion is not just something to meet my personal needs. Religion is also about what I do for the common good and especially for the poor.

In today's *Gospel*, we said, Jesus compares *his* followers to salt and light. These are interesting examples, because salt and light are of no use if they are *not being directed to meeting* the actual needs of people. In the warm climate of the Middle East with no refrigeration, salt was essential as a preservative of foods. But salt sitting in someone's cupboard isn't preserving anything. A lamp, set up in the typical one room, windowless home of that time carried out a public function. In its light some people could read, others could sew, others could prepare food. But a lamp hid under a bed was no use to anyone.

God's gifts to us of faith, hope and love are not just things we can hide away for ourselves. They are gifts we are to use in order to bring light and healing to our world. The *Responsorial Psalm* makes this point, when it pictures the person of true wisdom as someone who acts like God by being a source of blessing to others. The Church is not here just for the good of the Church; it is here for the good of the world.

It Means Genuine Religion Involves Practising Works of Mercy, Compassion and Justice

For teachers, one of the more frustrating questions students ask is: "Do we need to know this for the exam?" A teacher always hopes people will want to know the truth just because it is the truth. However all of us tend to wonder what we are answerable for. So too with life. When I come before God for judgment, what will I be examined on? What test will I have to meet? The 25th chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel gives us the answer. There Jesus says the Judge will say to those on His right hand: "Come, blessed of my

Father, enter the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world." Why? Because your rituals were proper, or your fasts exactly according to the law? No. "Because I was hungry and you gave me to eat, thirsty and you gave me to drink, naked and you covered me." So the true follower of Jesus, even one who doesn't know Jesus explicitly, is one who acts as salt and light for our world by doing the things that help create a genuinely caring, a just and so a God-like society.

It Means Genuine Religion Finds its Source in Jesus Christ

After a person is baptized, the priest presents that person with a lighted candle, to show that the role of the Christian is to be light for the world. But notice this. The priest lights that candle from the Easter Candle that represents Christ. None of us can be authentic light or salt for our world unless Christ is the source of our light and our power. It is only Jesus who is the real light for the world, and who is actually the way, the truth and life. So our authenticity depends on our reflecting Him.

The only reason why people would be able to see our good works and so give glory to our Father in heaven, as Jesus says in today's *Gospel*, would be if they could see the Father reflected in us. That is why our life has to be rooted in Christ. This brings out clearly the centrality of the Holy Eucharist in our lives. It is easy to become casual about receiving Our Lord in Holy Communion. But we need to receive Him worthily and with great care. That may mean going to confession first. It also means reflecting on what we are doing, and realizing that this bodily union with Him commits us to take on also His mind, His heart, His attitudes, His teaching of the Sermon on the Mount.

Conclusion

For several years now all new cars built in Canada have to be so constructed that their lights are on whenever they are being driven. I think we all see what a benefit that is, and how many lives it has saved. Today you and I are called on to be lights in our society, and if we carry that out, it will save much more than people's lives.