

In Sunday's Gospel reading, Jesus says to His disciples, "You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world." By saying this, Jesus tells us that we have a purpose as His disciples. We are here for a reason. We are "salt," that is, we are to "season" the world with the Good News of Jesus Christ. We are to bring Gospel values into the way we work and study and play. While we do not impose our beliefs on others, our faith should influence how we relate to others, not only at home or in church but wherever we may be. We are "light," bringing the light of Christ into the world. We are to live so that others see the light and love of Christ in us.

How are we to live out our purpose? In our other Scripture readings, I think we get a good indication of what we are called to do. In our second reading from 1 Corinthians, St. Paul reminds the community of what he did while he was with them. He came to them "proclaiming the mystery of God." He resolved to "know nothing," "except Jesus Christ, and him crucified." When we proclaim "the mystery of God," we are sharing with them the love of God in Jesus Christ, a love so great that the Son of God died on the Cross for our sins, and that He rose from the dead to give us the promise of everlasting life!

So we proclaim God's love not only in the words we speak but in the things we do. This is what we hear in our first reading from the prophet Isaiah. Through the prophet God tells the people: "Share your bread with the hungry, shelter the oppressed and the homeless; clothe the naked when you see them, and do not turn your back on your own." Later on, Isaiah talks about removing "oppression, false accusation and malicious speech," and satisfying "the afflicted." In other words, we proclaim the mystery of God's love, by tending to the needs of people, especially those who are carrying heavy crosses.

When we reach out to the poor and oppressed, we are representing a set of values different from "business as usual." When we refrain from "false accusation" and "malicious speech," we are bringing light into a situation of darkness. The world often relies on oppression to get what it wants and then justifies it with false stereotypes and malicious language. When those who are different are dehumanized and demonized, it is easier to wage war or commit acts of terror, or engage in discrimination. But if we are true to our purpose as "salt" and "light," something different than war and terror could be the result. Isaiah tells us that if we do what God commands, our "wound shall quickly be healed," and "the gloom shall become for you like midday." When we live out our vocations, the "wounds" of our selfishness are quickly healed; the "gloom" of apathy and despair are lifted from us. Healing and reconciliation and hope are more evident in the world.

Being "salt" and "light" is a gift from God. It is only through the love of God in Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit that we *can* be the "salt of the earth," and the "light of the world." We are not to keep this gift to ourselves, but to share it with others. Jesus says, "A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lamp stand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father."

We must not hide the light within us! The world needs more of the light of Christ! The world needs the light that has been given to us! Think of a string of Christmas lights that you would put on a Christmas tree. Some strings go out totally when one bulb is missing. Sometimes it is one person who can make a difference of whether there is something positive going on in a place or not. Some strings do not go out when a bulb is missing, but you notice the void when you put the string on the tree. There is a void, whether big or small, when our light does not shine. There is something missing when we are not sharing the love of Christ where we are.

Think of what would happen if *all of our* lights were shining! Think of what would happen if all of us did our part in the building up of the kingdom, and those who were afflicted were healed, and they were able to recognize the light that was in them, and *their* lights were shining, too! Is that not worth living for?

May God continue to bless us all, and may we be the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world.”

In Christ,

Fr. Phil, CP