14 Homily for the Fifth Sunday of the Ordinary Time Year A

5 February 2017

Is 58:7-10; 1 Cor 2:1-5; Mt 5:13-16

You are the light of the world and the salt of the earth! Very common two powerful Gospel images! Sometimes couples who are getting married in the Church would select this reading as there are strong sacrificial overtones in the reading, that are demanded of them to live out. These two images of light and salt communicate similar character traits. During severe winters, streets are slippery and quiet dangerous, so we have seen that in countries with such harsh winters, city roads are strewn with salt and all the vehicles that pass by grind them, crush them and crunch them under their wheels. And the pedestrians who pass by, trample them under foot. But as a result everybody is kept safe on the road and after sometime the salt disappears. It is the same with light. We may light a candle to dispel darkness in a room. As the candle burns the wax melts and evaporates. The status of the candle is no longer the same. But as a result everybody is able to see everything in the dark and soon the candle disappears.

We witness here a very important feature both in salt and in light. One can tangibly feel them. They are within the limits of sensory perception. One can taste salt and see light. So they are quite palpable. But they are only means to perceive things better. For example, we add salt to a curry or to marinate a steak. We don’t eat salt for lunch. What becomes our lunch is the curry or the steak. The meal tastes good, thanks to the salt added to the dish. So we relish the curry or the steak, not the salt. Same thing with light too. As one lights a candle or switches on a light, we don’t spend time looking at the light. What we do is to see things around the room that are lit by the light.

So when Christ said you are the light of the world and the salt of the earth, what he is truly saying is that it is high time that you give up becoming the centre of everything; reveal Christ to the world other than yourself. You need to decrease and the Lord in you has to increase. In service and in humility, your ego has to die and Christ in you has to be shown to the world. When we begin to show forth Christ through our lives, as the prophet Isaiah says today “your light will rise in the dark, and your shadow will be like noon.” (Isaiah 58:10). The people will be able to see not the light shining in you but the Lord that your light points to. Similarly, just as the salt becomes part of the food and in the process disappears but adds flavour, that flavour of yours has to bring out in other people a hunger and a thirst for the Lord.

For me friends, this is evangelization at its best. Because at the end of it you are contributing your best, all you have to bring about Christ, to show forth Christ in all that you do and say and wherever you are. Therefore, this salt of the earth and light of the world attitude evangelization needs certain fearlessness, certain audacity, ability to take risks. Pope Francis names those Christians who do not want take risks in bringing forth Christ as mothball Christians. In his own words; “take risks in evangelising, rather than staying stuffed up at home while the moths move in. Sometimes I think the best business we can do with many Christians, is to sell them mothballs so that they put them in their clothes and in their lives and aren’t eaten by moths.”

Let us discard “mothball Christians” mentality and move to “the salt of the earth and the light of the world Christian” mind frame.