

Salt of the earth and Light of the world

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. "

(Matthew 5: 13-16)

Today is Sunday after the All Saints Day (falling on November 1) and the All Souls Day (falling on November 2). All Souls Day is remembrance of "All the Faithful Departed" - an extension of the observance of All Saints Day. Today's scripture portions we heard are linked to the thoughts for these two days. We are celebrating today the lives of all the Saints in God's Kingdom - those who are well-known and unknown, those who are part of the visible Church and the invisible Church, those who are living today and those who are resting in peace.

So, what is the connection of today's Gospel text with the Saints? In Chapters 5, 6 and 7 Jesus is actually teaching his followers - through his famous Sermon on the Mount. His famous words: "You are the Salt of the earth and the Light of the world" are pointers towards a Christian Saint's basic qualities. These words provide the key to every Christian and the Church to the doors of sainthood.

Jesus delivered this message near the beginning of his ministry. It is the longest of Jesus' sermons recorded in the New Testament. One day while he was traveling near the Sea of

Galilee, Jesus decided to speak to His disciples about what it means to follow him. Jesus "went up on a mountainside" (5:1) and gathered his core disciples around him. The rest of the crowd found places along the side of the hill and at the level place near the bottom in order to hear what Jesus taught his closest followers. One scholar calls the Sermon on the Mount as "The Ordination Address to the Twelve".

The Sermon on the Mount is by far Jesus' longest explanation of what it looks like to live as his follower and to serve as a member of God's Kingdom. In many ways, the Sermon lays down the summary of Christian faith. For example, Jesus taught about subjects such as prayer, justice, care for the needy, handling the religious law, divorce, fasting, judging other people, salvation, and much more. The Sermon on the Mount contains both the Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer - two shining pillars of Christian faith.

Turning to today's Gospel text, Jesus uses the words Salt and Light to teach an important lesson. In a way, he is addressing his immediate audience at the hill side and also the future Church. Thus we need to meditate these words both as individuals and as Church.

Jesus says: "You are the Salt of the earth." Salt was a necessity of life in ancient times - a highly valued substance. Salt has different qualities and functions.

First, salt was connected with purity. Jewish sacrifices were offered with salt. If we have to be the Salt of the earth we must be examples of purity - in our words, conduct and even in thought. Not an easy instruction to follow!

Second, salt is a well-known preservative. It was widely used in ancient world to preserve items such as meat and fish from decay. There were no electric refrigerators in those days. Salt preserves from corruption and decay. As Christians we must have an antiseptic influence on life. We must be known as people who make it easier for others to be good.

Third, salt renders taste to things. Food without salt is insipid and tasteless. Christianity lends flavor and taste to life.

Fourth, salt brings healing. A wound is cleansed with salt water. As Christians we must be able to heal others' wounds.

What does Jesus really mean by the phrase, "but if the salt has lost its saltiness, it is useless, and worthy of being thrown out - to be trampled by - underfoot." This is a warning to us. We fail to live the salt of the earth when we prefer to stay in the safety of the salt shaker - so to speak - just staying in our comfort zone and safe world - rather than fulfill our call of duty out in the world. Jesus is warning us against a kind of bland existence. It is not enough that the followers of Jesus are the salt of the earth. Jesus wants us and the Church to get

out of the salt shaker into the impure, corrupt, flavorless, wounded world! That is exactly what the Saints did and continue to do.

“You are the Light of the world.” We are called to exist in the world to give light to others. The Church needs to be seen as a light house, a beacon of light. Our faith in Christ should be clearly visible to all people. A light is a guide. A Christian and the Church must make the way clear to others. Also, a light can often be a warning light which tells us to halt when there is danger ahead. The Light which can be seen, the Light which warns, the Light which guides. Those around us must not only hear our good words, but see our good works.

There is something common between Salt and Light. In every preparation we add only a very small quantity of salt. Yet a little salt makes a huge difference on the overall outcome.

Similarly in the church hall we are seated now, look up or around and see the size of the bulbs which illuminate this place. Small bulbs or lamps light such a large place. Darkness flees the entire space once a small bulb or light is switched on.

If I am the Salt of the earth and the Light of the world, then I have the ability to make big things happen. Sometimes, because we feel outnumbered or overwhelmed at the sheer magnitude of evil or wrong-doers, we then choose powerlessness, and decide to go with the flow, not standing up for what we believe is right.

This is how we become living Saints - being the Salt of the earth and the Light of the world. Look around. God has always been working through small people - small in numbers but high in quality. Jesus began his ministry with 12 very ordinary persons and look where all has it reached. Let us not be discouraged by the empty pews in our Churches. It is the quality of those present in the pews that matters.

Let us make our presence felt in the families and communities where we are placed - through our saltiness and shining light. Jesus has laid much higher standards - with Salt and Light - for you and me and the Church. He says: “You are the Salt of the earth and the Light of the world.” Are we?

Amen.