

8. June 2021

“Salt for the Earth and Light for the World”

Mt 5:13-16

'You are salt for the earth. But if salt loses its taste, what can make it salty again? It is good for nothing, and can only be thrown out to be trampled under people's feet. 'You are light for the world. A city built on a hill-top cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp to put it under a tub; they put it on the lamp-stand where it shines for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine in people's sight, so that, seeing your good works, they may give praise to your Father in heaven.

How tremendous is this word of the Lord! What a challenge it is for us Christians! Both comparisons, salt and light, point to the same goal: *“Your light must shine in people's sight, so that, seeing your good works, they may give praise to your Father in heaven.”*

We know well that salt is what gives taste to food. Without salt, it is often tasteless. So we are salt for the earth when we speak the truth and bear witness to it. There are countless opinions and points of view, but all of them acquire their value only to the extent that they come close to the truth and are touched by it.

In the natural realm, we can easily understand this. When we grasp the logic inherent in things and treat them according to the instructions of use, so to speak, then we act properly and correctly. It is the same in the spiritual realm. God unequivocally gave us the Ten Commandments as the solid foundation of our existence. If we keep them, we will attain eternal life. This is what Jesus clearly tells us (*cf. Mk 10:17-19*). On the other hand, if we deviate from the commandments, our life is deviating and failing, even if we do not immediately notice it.

The inherent truth of life, then, is in living according to God's Will. The further we turn away from Him, the more we fall into confusion about what is essential and decisive for life. These sentences I have chosen are very simple; it is a simple truth.

However, it is not enough for us to know the truth; all people must recognise it through the proclamation of the Church. But is the truth still sufficiently proclaimed in our time? Do we still bear witness to it in a world that gradually

ceases to regard all of God's commandments as universally valid? Do we still dare to call sin by its name and point out the reasons why human life fails? Or has the salt become tasteless? Is it also the case that we in the Church are beginning to speak in the way of the world and to adapt ourselves to it? Is this not how the salt becomes tasteless and is trampled underfoot by people? If this were so, then the world would no longer even find any controversy with the Church or points for debate, for it would have become lukewarm.

To put it even more clearly... We know that Jesus, being the Son of God, is the Truth in person (*cf. Jn 14:6*), and that in no other name is there salvation (*cf. Acts 4:12*). Do we continue to proclaim this objective truth with all that it implies? Certainly faith cannot and must not be imposed on anyone. But we do owe God and the world our witness, otherwise the salt becomes tasteless.

If we have linked salt with the proclamation of truth, we could associate light with our witness of life, marked by love. Indeed, love, which impels us to supernatural acts, has an enormous radiance and attraction. Its radiance does not always have to be public, like a shining sun; it can also act in the hidden world, without ceasing to be a light on the lamp-stand. It may be a doctor who attends to his patients in the love of the Lord; or a teacher who patiently instructs her students; or a mother who never tires of pointing out to her children the right way. If all this is done in the love of the Lord, then the testimony has force in itself; but it becomes even clearer the moment the reference to God is directly established.

Some time ago a well-known man died in Germany, who in his life had done much good and helped people in need. By chance, I heard a programme on the radio about this man's life. The speaker was a friend of his, and he mentioned that this man had been a Catholic. Although the words were well chosen, something was missing, which did not leave me completely at peace. Then I understood what was missing. If the friend of the deceased had specified that all that he had done for the refugees, had been thanks to the strength that the Catholic faith had given him, then the testimony would have been more transparent to God. Perhaps then some of the listeners would have paid attention and begun to reflect on faith.

We are not called to be light for ourselves, but as a witness to the One who is the true light (*cf. Jn 8:12*). We do good works because God gives us the strength and grace to do them, and we simply cooperate. If we do not point to God as the source and origin of all good, our witness is missing something fundamental and remains incomplete. People should not stay with us and admire us for our works, but praise our Father in heaven.

The proclamation of faith and works; truth and love; salt and light go together. Let us ask the Lord for the grace never to become lukewarm, for then would cease to be both the one and the other.