

Homily for February 10, 2002  
5th Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle A

By Father Charles Bowes

Isaiah 58:7-10  
1 Corinthians 2:1-5  
Matthew 5:13-16

## *Being salt and light is God's doing in us.*

“You are the salt of the earth...you are light of the world”...says Jesus in Matthew chapter 5. And then Jesus goes on to say, as narrated by Saint Matthew, “Therefore let your light shine...” And here again, suddenly, I find myself with more work to do...now, in addition to being priest and pastor and God knows what all, I must be salt and light. And so we beat ourselves up over what we are not, and come away instead of rejoicing with a sense of having yet another task to accomplish.

But did it ever occur to you that perhaps the reason Jesus is calling us salt and light is because he first experienced himself just that – salt and light? And because we are Jesus’ relatives as human beings and even more so through baptism, we share that same saltiness, that same light. We just naturally are that way – every human being is that way. The difference is in Jesus’ consciousness, I think, in that Jesus recognized his uniqueness as gift from the Father, dependent upon the Father. We are more apt to

take our saltiness and illumination for granted, dependent upon our own strength or weakness, measured by the value we place upon it.

Perhaps our prayer to the Lord might go something like this: “Lord, was there ever a time when you felt a little dim – a little less flavorful as though perhaps you weren’t able to produce on command everything others wanted or needed? Or were you ever proud and glad to be so bright and unique?” And then once we ask the question, we need merely listen – listen for the spirit of God to speak within, deep within. And as we pray in this way, we experience our gifts and talents not as totally our own, but as Jesus did, as things received, as gifts. The pressure is lifted a bit and even though we truly are gifted in many different ways as light and salt, as teachers and policemen and business people and craftsman, students and care-givers – when we ask the Lord, “Did you ever struggle in handling your gifts?”, we thereby in that moment invite God to be near and to be with us, companioning, supporting – the true source of our illumination and flavor.

The plain truth is, it’s not all our doing this enterprise of life, this enterprise of being the world’s illumination and flavor. God is in charge – Jesus knew this profoundly and was successful at being God’s son:

successful in allowing the Father to support and give strength. In this way, Jesus' light, our light, can shine with a brightness not of our making – in such a way that we are aware and feel God's presence and support in everything we do. And for this we give praise to the Father who nourishes us with the food that becomes what we are and thereby make us into the Jesus we are called to be – one who is supported and given life by an all-loving God so that the world is a better place for our living in it.

This coming Wednesday Lent begins – a time to choose a penance that makes us aware of our weakness and out of which we will pray: “Lord, did you fast and pray and give alms? And did you feel strong or weak in doing so?” In this way we shall experience our powerlessness and our penance as gifts.

The Sufi masters tell the story of the salt doll. For thousands of miles, the salt doll searched the world over until it encountered the sea. “Who are you?” the doll asked the great sea. The sea warmly invited the salt doll into itself, “Come and see!” Little by little the doll waded into the great moving ocean. Wading in, the doll slowly dissolved into the vastness. With only tiny particles remaining the doll exclaimed with great joy, “At last! Now I know who I am!”

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doing in us.