

5th Sunday – A
February 5, 2017
Holy Spirit (SH/HT/HG-9:30)

Is 58:7-10
I Cor 2:1-5
Matt 5:13-16

“You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.”

I. Recently, sometime in the past few weeks, I came across a pro-life group who says their approach to abortion is not to change the law but, rather, they want to change hearts concerning life – and if they can do that, then no one would want an abortion and thus there would be no need for abortion providers.

When Jesus says to us we are the salt of the earth, we are the light of the world, he is talking about who we are in our being – who we are in the heart.

I have often thought that changing hearts could be applied to a lot of different issues – drug abuse, for example. We work awfully hard on arresting drug dealers, capturing drug lords, preventing drugs from being smuggled into the country and so on, but if we could also just build ourselves into a people of integrity, people who rely upon our own resources, on our own success stories, on building strong self-esteem in order to get “high” on life – then we wouldn’t want or need artificial means like drugs to get “high” on life. In other words, if we take away the demand, there wouldn’t be any concern for the supply. In fact, the supply would look kind of silly.

And that philosophy could be applied to lots of social issues we face –like pornography, sexual abuse, other kinds of abuse, dysfunctional relationships and so on: if we, as individuals, families and communities build strong self-esteem, develop discipline and character, then we would have the strength to stand up to so many of these self destructive forces swirling around us.

We do need to work on making laws which are just and which lead to safe environments and good health, but part of that effort can also be on changing hearts. If we just build ourselves into people of character who want to be the best people we can be without lowering ourselves into evil and self-destructive behaviors, then so many problems would be diminished.

II. Those two metaphors presented in the gospel – salt and light - can help us get in to this mentality: Jesus is talking who his disciples are on the inside.

- think about it: salt and light are two simple things, yet essential and powerful
- back in the 1st century, salt was way more important than today because it was used to preserve food. Since they didn't have refrigeration, it was very valuable; I understand even wars were fought over salt. But today salt is still very important to us; in some foods it does act as a preservative, but nowadays we use it primarily for flavoring. No salt in food allows it to remain bland and unappealing. Too much salt over powers the food and we can't eat it. It just takes a little: one teaspoon in a pot of soup is all we need!
- the same is true with light. Think of the first century – no electric lights: the sun by day, the moon by night and maybe a dim lantern. But even today go out into the country, like western Iowa or the Dakotas where there are few electric lights: we experience darkness and just a farm light in the distance as a guide, a sign of reassurance. Nowadays we are used to having lots of light, but even just a little light will light a room. A little light on a flashlight will guide our way; a little light dispels the darkness and gives us that reassurance everything is okay.

III. Jesus says *we are salt and we are light.*

“You are the salt of the earth.” “You are the light of the world.”

You are – Jesus doesn't say we are similar to, or like, salt and light, but rather, Jesus says we, in fact, are salt and light.

We are that flavor; we are that guide.

III. And we do that by who we are.

I look around our community, and especially our parish, and I see lots and lots of good, hard working, dedicated, sincere people.

Many of us hold two jobs, sometimes even three

I see husbands and wives, mothers and fathers working hard for their families, working for their children – they would anything for their children.

We are not the power brokers of society – but we are powerful!

We are powerful – when we are salt and light.

Jesus is saying *we* are the ones who make a difference; we make a difference when we live out of our being, out of who we are as his disciples. We are salt and light when we live as his disciples from our heart. And when we do that, we make a difference in society.

IV. Isaiah's prescription for moving beyond superficiality in religion sounds very much like the corporal works of mercy we have just finished working on this past Year of Mercy: share your bread with the hungry, shelter the oppressed and the homeless, clothe the naked when you see them, do not turn your back on your own.....

Also practicing the spiritual works of mercy: teaching the ignorant, advising the doubtful, comforting the sorrowful, forgiving injuries, bearing wrongs patiently....these are all practical ways of being and living as a disciple of Jesus.

Whenever we are there for each other in our family life, in friendship, at our place of work, being active in our community...*we are that flavor* which makes all the difference. We are that light which guides, soothes, comforts, leads...

In this way, we become and are powerful because we are helping to build character, form strong marriages and families, unifying communities. Christians become leaven that influences the whole of society.

V. And we do not do that for ourselves, not for our glory or attention, but ultimately for God: Jesus said, "...your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father."

When we are salt and light we help to transform the world and light the way for others to find God in their lives.

Fr. Dwayne Thoman