

February 9, 2014 Light and Salt Homily

Dear brothers and sisters, there is a lovely story told about the late Mother Teresa of Calcutta, now declared Blessed by the Universal Church. In Melbourne Australia, Mother visited a man no one knew existed. She saw that his room was in horrible condition. She wanted to clean it up, but he tried to stop her. "Don't bother", he cried. Undeterred, Mother ignored him and began cleaning the room. In his room was a beautiful lamp covered with dust. Puzzled, Mother asked why he hadn't bothered to light the lamp. "What for? Nobody comes to see me and I don't need a lamp" Mother replied, "Will you light the lamp if the sisters come to see you?" "Yes", he said. "If I hear a human voice, I will light it". Sometime later, the missionary sisters of Charity received a message from the Aussie, who wrote; "Tell my friend that the lamp she lit in my life burns constantly". Perhaps we can appreciate why saints are often depicted with haloes, a ring of light around their heads!

In Christ's justly famous Sermon on the Mount he compares his disciples to salt, light and a city on a hill. (Mt.5:13-16) The whole purpose of the Church is to cast light --- God's light --- on the world. Our business is to allow God to shed his light through us. The prophet Isaiah informs his listeners how they can be a light to the nations. "Share your bread with the hungry, shelter the oppressed and the homeless and clothe the naked".(Is. 58:7-8).

Few can deny that Christ's shimmering light has dimmed in recent decades. In our secular culture, Christ is often ignored or, even worse, mocked. Several years ago, the distinguished theologian Fr. James Burtchaell, wrote a Book "The dying of the light" in which he bemoaned the absence of Christ in many of the universities founded by sincere, devout Christians. Take Harvard University as an example. This prestigious school was founded by Protestants (Congregationalists, I think). Nowadays, Christians on campus are subjected to subtle, if not outright discrimination and secular bigotry.

In Hasidic Jewish folklore there is a fascinating story told about one Rabbi Moshe Loeb. Once, a rabbinical student approached him to ask a question. "Rabbi, how must one respond to a person who has the ability to deny the existence of God?" After a long pause, the rabbi replied, "When someone comes to you and asks for help, then you must not say with a pious mouth---'Have trust and cast your care on God' -----What you must do is act as if God did not exist, as if in the whole world only one person could help that man---you alone!"

Listen again to the words of the prophet Isaiah from our first reading: "If you bestow your bread on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted, then light shall rise for you in the darkness and the gloom shall become for you like midday"(Is.58:10). We must be mindful that we have been commissioned by Christ to be bearers of his light. If we fail in our vocation, the world will suffer the tragic consequences. Christ speaks to us: "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father" (Mt.5:16).

Help us. O lord, to fulfill our mission in this life.

Amen