

The Fifth Sunday of the Year.

Light pollution in the Holy Land is not as widespread as it is in our own country. In many places away from Jerusalem, in the more mountainous parts it can be very dark at night and the night sky seen from the desert is amazing. The deep darkness also helps to explain Jesus' mention of the cities built on hill-tops. There are very few tall trees and, especially in the darkness, they cannot be hidden. In fact hill-top cities are so recognisable both at night and in the day time that they are a useful means of finding direction. Cities on hill-tops have an influence on all those around them because their presence cannot be missed.

It is that idea of a presence that cannot be missed that provides a clear focus for the message of our readings from Sacred Scripture today. The issue, summed up in our psalm, is all about the difference we make to the faith and trust of others in the reality of God. So we reflected this morning "The good person is a light in the darkness for the upright." Often, when speaking to new members of the Church, I ask them what it was that sparked off the desire to become a Catholic. More often than not they speak of a person they met whose life and manner spoke of the presence of God and that they were attracted by it.

In his teaching to us his disciples, Jesus tells us to be the 'salt of the earth'. In Jesus' time salt was a valuable commodity because it was used for preserving food and for purification. Its value is in its power to affect other foods and if it loses that power it is useless; fit only to be thrown out. Notice how the importance of salt for Jesus was its potential to influence other things apart from itself.

Then the Lord invites us to consider that we are 'the light of the world'. In a similar way to salt light exists so that people might be able to see. To put the light under a tub is ridiculous and the light might not exist.

During one of my home visits this week, the parents brought their new born baby to show me. The baby was tiny and beautiful and I was overcome with emotion and a sense of the closeness of God. I was struck by the tiny and yet beautiful hands of the baby, which spoke to me of the power and beauty of their creator. In their own way that baby and her parents changed me and made me more aware of the presence of God in my life.

Salt, light, a city on a hill-top, a lamp on a stand, a tiny and new born baby all proclaim the truth that we influence one another. Each of us is unique and different, endowed with our own powers and gifts and by the power of the Spirit given us in baptism and confirmation. It is the Spirit and gift of God that uses our lives and the powers we have to speak to others of his presence and his invitation to believe in him, to trust, to enter a personal relationship with him.

Each of us with our own experience and personalities, our gifts, strengths and powers is an amazing and beautiful reality and today at Mass we give thanks to the creator. Today the Lord invites us to consider that each of us, while contained within a body with an outer layer of skin, is not limited to that body. Like salt, light and any form of beauty our influence extends beyond ourselves and changes those around us who share our lives. Each good person is a light in the darkness for the upright. Just as light extends in all directions and cannot be contained so our influence in the world and amongst other human beings is limitless in its potential for change and good. That is why Jesus describes us as the light and salt of the world.

The psalm today tells us that it is goodness that will help be effective as light in the darkness for others. The point being that the more we give life following the example of Christ's life, the more we will bring the presence of Christ to others and move them to open their own lives to him. So Jesus says that our light must shine for others so that, seeing our good works, they may give the praise to our Father in heaven. The Spirit of God, who dwells within us, completes all our acts of love and humanity and makes them vehicles of Christ's own love.

So what are these good works? What is it to live our lives in the kind of goodness that becomes light in the darkness for others.

St Paul describes the great wisdom that has been given to us, things that go beyond our understanding. We must do all we can to ensure that our lives are rooted and grounded in our relationship with Christ by being faithful to him in prayer; attentive to his presence in our lives; always reflecting on the message of scripture and treasuring the teachings of Christian Tradition, which gives me an opportunity to mention Fr. John's talks on the catechism.

Fidelity to Christ opens us to that vital and indispensable challenge for disciples of the Lord and all human beings, which is seeing that way we connect with others as being the channel through which the light of Christ can flow, if we allow the channel of communication and connectivity to be completely open. The temptation is to allow obstacles to impede the progress of divine light. The obstacles of fear, selfishness, anxiety and thinking that life is better without others as long as we have enough power, pleasure or possessions.

No our love must be modelled on that of Christ. Completely attentive to those who share our lives and completely aware of their needs and expectations. Always ready to respond to every person that God gives us with patience, forgiveness, gentleness and an understanding that sees them as created by God in his image and infinitely loved by him.