

DAY 5

I - LIGHT, SALT

LIGHT, SALT

As we *listen to him, my beloved Son*, we hear the Lord using a variety of images to convey his teaching and one of them is the double image of light and salt. For us, who are used to turning the light on and off at the flick of a switch, the image of light may look almost trivial. For the people Jesus was addressing light was a most essential thing after sundown, one that required a supply of oil for a lamp.

Let me run a quick test, but please do not look up to the ceiling or around: how many lights are there in this room? You probably do not know and I certainly do not know either and that is precisely the point of my test. Lights are not there to be looked at, but to help people see what otherwise would remain unseen, and this is something that light has in common with salt: they are not used for their own sake. Salt is not meant to be eaten –we would spit it out– and it does not have much nutritional value by itself –in fact too much salt is harmful. Salt is meant to make palatable things that do have nutritional value. That is what we are called to be: people who help others to see what would otherwise remain unseen, people who make palatable a way of life that has spiritual nutritional value.

Although light elements are sold in various sorts of fixtures like lamps or chandeliers, the fixtures themselves do not give light. There has to be in the fixture something incandescent like a wire or a vapor that does give light. Unless there is a fire inside us, we will remain lightless fixtures. We need in our hearts what the recently canonized St. Alberto Hurtado called “a fire that kindles other fires”.

Yet this awareness of the need for an inner fire, in order for us to be light, can lead to a distortion. There are a number of types of lights, some being the typical standard lights and some being high intensity lights, think of ordinary light bulbs vs. old-fashion camera flash bulbs. The flash bulb dazzled us, even blinded us momentarily and then stopped giving light. We have all known in our own Church lights that for a while shone brightly and then stopped giving light. Most of us are called to be steady dependable lights, lights that last, and that is certainly good enough for me. Those who are gifted and called to be high intensity lights had better be rechargeable and actually allow themselves to be recharged –oil for the lamp –, otherwise they will burn out.

As we *listen to him, my beloved Son*, we hear the Lord calling us to be salt, to be light. Of course, no one of us will **alone** give light to the entire world, nor are we called to do that. Before being hanged in prison by the Nazi regime, Fr. Alfred Delp, S.J. managed to smuggle out of jail a series of notes, one of which read (here in inclusive language): *When through one person a little more light and truth, a little more love and goodness, has come into the world, then that person's life has had meaning.* Actually we are not ourselves the real source of light. Jesus himself is the light that we are meant to reflect. It is he who gives light to the world and gives taste to a flat and tasteless world. But through baptism all of us share in his mission.

There are days, when we do not feel much like light or salt, when we ourselves feel flat, tasteless and dimmed. Yet the source of our being light and taste-giving is always there available to us, even when we feel distant from that source and feel the Lord distant from us.

REFERENCE SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

LIGHT, SALT

Mt. 5: 13-16

You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lamp stand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.

Other pertinent texts

Eph. 5: 8-9 You were darkness once, but now you are light in the Lord.