Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



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“You are the light of the world” (Matt 5:13).

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Is 58:7-10; Ps 112; 1 Cor 2:1-5; Mt 5:13-16

One of the most decisive questions confronting the church is whether it is in the world or apart from the world.

One way to separate it from the world has been to say that Christian faith is essentially a spiritual reality focused on the salvation of souls. Good Christians are those who remain aloof from material concerns, unworldly and uncontaminated by the “world, the flesh and the devil.”

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus takes a decidedly different view of the role his followers were to play in history and in the world. He begins with the Beatitudes, descriptions of a community that engages society with its witness to justice, peace-making, mercy, compassion and humility, even if rejected and persecuted by the dominant culture.

The mission they received from him is not to be hidden or spiritualized. They must be the light of the world and the salt of the earth. Be seen, permeate your lives with your faith, for you are not sent to ignore the world but to transform it.

Faith, then, expresses the underlying mystery of the Incarnation. God is in the world, among us, one of us. Our flesh, our daily responsibilities and personal relationships are how we make the Kingdom of God real. Grace suffuses everything human. Politics, media, social and cultural commitments, our careers in business, education, finance, the arts, medicine and public service are all realms where faith shapes people’s lives.

Pope Francis’ trip to Africa this past week illustrates this deep engagement with the politics and economics of this world. He clearly saw it within his role as a spiritual leader to castigate the large nations competing for resources in Africa as one of the causes of division and violence there. He challenged African leaders to stop the corruption and conflicts within their governments in order to serve the needs of their impoverished and abused people.

Today’s first reading from the Prophet Isaiah calls believers to show their love for God by caring for the poor, the hungry, the homeless and naked. This is how we show we are serious about our faith. What good is our piety and personal morality if it does not express itself in service and compassion to our vulnerable neighbors? God sees who we are by what we do. The blessings showered on us are meant to be shared.

One question every church ought to ask, especially as it concludes its Sunday worship and its members head back out into the world and into the week ahead, is this: What difference does it make that we were here praising God, listening to the Scriptures and receiving Communion? What impact do we have on the neighborhood around us, the city we are part of, the world we live in?

It is a question on which our own salvation may depend. We are the light of the world, the salt of the earth. Does the world know this, and if not, why not?