

## **You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.**

Salt and light are what we are according to the Lord. Why not pepper and dark? And why is the salt not of the world but of the earth? It may have been simpler to say you are the salt and light of the world. As always there is much divine wisdom in these prophetic sayings.

Firstly, what is salt? Sodium chloride is its chemical name. Salt has had much bad press for health reasons in recent generations but in antiquity it was a much valued resource. In fact it was so valued as a natural compound that it was used as form of revenue and payment – like gold or silver is today. The Latin word for salt is sal which gave rise to the word salary. Why was it so esteemed? For three very good reasons: 1. it was the only means of preserving food – mainly meat and fish; 2. it was a healing agent for wounds before antiseptics; 3. it added flavour to food. So salt was a natural resource much esteemed in everyone's ladder (I am not talking about refined bleached salt that we find on our tables but organic natural salt filled with minerals). Note that being an extraneous agent it is valued because it goes on or in us.

We are likened to salt by Christ for those same three reasons. 1. We are meant to preserve our faith and pass it on, as it was passed on to us; 2. Our faith heals us from within. It heals us from sin and guilt; 3. Our faith adds flavour to the mundane aspects of daily living – it adds meaning to meaningless tasks because we do it for the sake of the Lord – for Christ's sake!

You are the light of the world – not the earth. The light is in the world because it pertains to our sight that lies within. Salt is an external physical compound unlike light. What is light? If you google it up then the common technological answer is that *Light* or visible *light* is electromagnetic radiation within the portion of the electromagnetic spectrum that can be perceived by the human eye. Visible *light* falls within the colour spectrum, rainbows and all that, somewhere in between the infra red and ultra violet rays. The EMS is most interesting and a good proof of the reality of unseen powers such as grace, as is wifi and uv rays which are also present but unseen.

Lest we digress, light in philosophical terms can be viewed as that which enables us to see. The organ of sight that requires light is the eye. What a fascinating organ – how complex and powerful and what a marvelous reminder of God's creative power. In biblical terms the eye is noted as the window of the soul. It is through the eye that one perceives reality. Light is not reality. Light only enables one to see reality. Note too that darkness is not a reality but the absence of it – as black is the absence of colour. Reality exists even if one cannot see it. It is objective we are subjective. So light is what connects us to a bigger world that, can lie within.

For us the true Light is Christ. From him at baptism we receive our light. Remember the Paschal Candle is a symbol of Christ and our baptismal candle is lit from it at our baptism. This burning light is actually sanctifying grace within the soul, that switches on, one might say, the light of his reality in our lives. A reality of eternal life. The big picture and our part to play in divine providence, the meaning of suffering, blessings etc.

Once we are enlightened then we are meant to manifest that light to others. The inner soul connected to divine light, his reality, is meant to cast a glow upon others. This light must not be hidden for it is meant to lead others to the light who is Christ. To hide the light, to hide our faith, would be like someone who wants to live in physical darkness or walk around with their eyes closed. Such a situation would be dangerous to their physical health. So also to hide our divine light would be detrimental to our spiritual health.

One person who did not hide her faith which resulted in the healing of many was Saint Bernadette. During the week we have the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes. Bernadette was born in France in 1844. Her parents were very poor and she was the first of nine children. As a toddler, she contracted cholera and suffered extreme asthma. Unfortunately, she lived the rest of her life in poor health. In 1858, fourteen-year-old Bernadette received the first of eighteen visions of the Mother of God. Note that she alone saw the Virgin Mary in a grotto called Massabielle, so maybe it was an internal vision. After repeated visions Bernadette was told that "I am the Immaculate Conception."

Though many townspeople believed she had indeed been seeing the Holy Virgin, Bernadette's story created a division in her town. Many believed she was telling the truth, while others believed she had a mental illness. Also other girls in the vicinity claimed to be having visions which caused even greater unrest. Eventually Church authorities and the French government rigorously interviewed the girl, and by 1862 they confirmed she spoke the truth. In time, Lourdes and its healing properties from the waters would become famous and today millions go there every year.

Bernadette became a nun and claimed that these visions occurred to her because "The Blessed Virgin chose me only because I was the most ignorant." She suffered much from the jealousy of others and was diagnosed with tuberculosis and died at the age of 35 while praying the holy rosary. Her body remains incorrupt today and she was canonised in 1933. Saint Bernadette is the patroness of illness both physical and mental. Why - because she did not hide her light within.