

February 5, 2023

Cycle A – 5th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Isaiah 58:7-10

Psalm: 112:4-5, 6-7, 8-9

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Matthew 5:13-16

Notes from Bishop Peter

Theme: “Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

1. Please recall a baptism ceremony. We see the large candle called the Pascal Candle because it was first lit during the Easter Vigil. It represents Jesus Christ risen from the dead, the light of the world.
 - a. After the child is baptized, the godfather takes a small candle and lights it from the Pascal Candle, showing that the newly baptized is called to be a disciple of Jesus and a source of light by the way he or she lives. “Let your light shine before others so that seeing your good works, they may give glory to God, our Father.”
 - b. Thus Jesus works through us to make himself and his life known today and every day. Not only does he call us, he empowers us to do so by the dynamism of the Holy Spirit who lives in our hearts.
2. In order to become true disciples, we need guidance in many areas. We shall see this as we continue to read the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7. Today’s first reading is a good example and is so important that I cite it in its entirety. The context: The Prophet criticizes his people who fast and perform other religious acts without sufficient action on behalf of the poor in their community:

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loosen the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?”

Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. If you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.”

- a. Thus the Lord wants us to treat others according to their dignity and our solidarity as human beings with them. Then our religious practices will be acceptable to him.
 - It is important that those like the young who dedicate themselves to service of the needy have a deep prayer life. Otherwise they risk getting burned out when they face so many obstacles.
- b. Examples of oppression: slavery, human trafficking, harming foreigners or people who are different, people who work for low wages and have no health benefits, fellow human beings who are homeless or live in substandard housing conditions, undocumented immigrants and so forth.
- c. But darkness doesn't have the last word because the light of Jesus shines forth from all those individuals and groups who assist people who have no voice such as:
 - The Sisters of Saint Joseph who founded Saint Francis and Saint Mary Hospitals, the Sisters of Mercy who taught immigrant children while living simply, the Apostles of the Sacred Heart in New Haven and their Immigrant Service located in the poorest section of that city, your parish and the Knights of Columbus and all your outreach services, community organizations like Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance who advocate for better housing conditions and The Collaborative Center for Justice founded by 6 communities of religious women who work for justice for those who have served their time in prison and the Center for Reflection, Action and Education that has been in the forefront of the struggle to convince people that climate change is a reality and must be addressed effectively for the common good.
 - The Archbishop's Annual Appeal that gives so many individuals the opportunity to help the needy through support given to so many community agencies and non-profits such as those mentioned above.

3. Finally, we come to the Eucharistic part of our Mass. It is Jesus the light of the world who pours through us so his light may overcome the darkness of indifference and evil. As Saint Paul wrote: "For God, who said, 'Let there be light in the darkness,' has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ." (II Corinthians 4:6)
And the face of Jesus is that of our sisters and brothers who are suffering.

Amen.