

MANDELA DAY

We are the “salt of the earth”. We are the “light of the world”. Two powerful images that describe our role as followers of the Lord Jesus, as witnesses of his way in the world today. “Salt” and “Light”.

Salt is so often taken for granted in our daily living. It’s so readily available; that we forget that salt is vital to life and our well-being. Ancient societies were all too aware of the importance of salt, not only for the body’s proper functioning, but also for its role in preserving, in seasoning and in giving flavour to food. So much importance was attached to salt, that the word ‘salary’ comes from ‘salarius’ – the quote of salt given to Roman soldiers for their service. Salt is the “stuff of life”.

Jesus calls us to be the salt of the earth. Just as salt is integral to life, we are to become integral to our world. We are to be responsible for its healthy functioning. We are to preserve what is good and noble and true. We are to give flavour to life and our world with our example of compassion, mercy, justice, peace, love. To be inactive, is to be like salt that has lost its saltiness and is only fit to be discarded, thrown away, trampled underfoot. To be inactive, is to fail God and our calling. To be inactive is to risk losing our relevance in life and society. We are salt, and we are light.

The keeper of a lighthouse is justifiably proud of the brilliant light his structure gives off. He knows that if the light goes out, there will be a shipwreck. In a similar way, we too “are the light of the world”. Every one of us exerts an influence. Our lives are continually radiating light or darkness. There are ripples of influence that we cannot control or stop. Everything we say, or do, everything we are and everything we stand for has a ripple effect. It either hurts or helps. It either leads or misleads. It either advances God’s Kingdom or hinders it. We are responsible for the influence we send out in our lives.

We may not shine too brightly, and sometimes our lives may only be a glimmer of what they ought to be. But even so, if we are true followers of Jesus, our lives will be of light and not of darkness. St. John Chrysostom has said:

“Christ left us on earth in order that we should become like beacons of light, and teachers unto others; that we might act like leaven, move among men like angels, be like adults to children, like spiritual persons to animal-like persons, that we may be like seed, and bear abundant fruits. There would be no need for sermons, if our lives were shining. There would be no need for words, if we bore witness with our actions. There would be no unbeliever, if we were true Christians.”

When we were baptised, we were illuminated – we received the Light. God lit His flame in our soul. He planted His light within us so that we may shine for Him in the world. One of the prerequisites for letting the light of God shine *through* us is to keep it burning brightly *within* us. Our task, as St. Paul says, is to “cast off the works of darkness” and put on the armour of light”. We will be incapable of allowing light to shine through us until we allow it to burn brightly within us, until we deal with the dirt, the mud, the soot, that is obstructing it. That is why Jesus warns, “If the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!”

Removing our own darkness involves honesty, sincerity, repentance, confession and cultivating the presence of Christ in our lives and never to depart from the presence. It is this presence of Christ that feeds the light in us, that generates light through us. If we seek out that presence constantly

through continuous prayer, scripture reading and meditation, and participation in the Sacramental life of the Church, our lives cannot *but* reflect the light of Christ through our good works.

St. Francis of Assisi was poor, frail in purse and body. No excess possessions, no surplus muscles or strength. Plain sandals, rude cloak, rough cowl. Not much to look at. But, no one ever saw *him* when they looked. They saw *in* him the One he reflected. He was a mirror of Christ.

It seems like an impossible task, a big order for us 'ordinary people'. The world is huge and well, we probably find it hard enough to shine in our own homes or work place.

But God is not asking us to be big enough for the job. It's not being 'big' that counts. Its faithfulness and sincerity and effort that count. All the darkness in the entire universe can't conquer the light of a single small candle. We may, each of us, be single small candles, but we each pierce the darkness and together, we can flood the world with light.

One such light-bearer is our own Nelson Mandela. He spent sixty-seven years in the struggle for human rights and democracy, twenty-seven of those years in prison, and yet, as our first democratically elected president, gave priority to reconciliation.

In those fragile years and volatile times after his release from prison, one word from him could have plunged this country into darkness and bloodshed. Yet his words were those of peace, of reconciliation and of facing the future together – a true leader, a visionary, a gentleman and a humanitarian – true 'salt of the earth' and 'light of the world' – becoming involved in so many projects and efforts to serve people in need.

Today, Madiba celebrates his birthday – and July 18 has been declared "Mandela Day" internationally and we are encouraged to celebrate it in true Mandela Spirit – to do our bit in making the world a better place, one small step at a time.

Over the past few days pupils from our school participated in this in various ways – doing their bit to bring comfort and help to those in need.

Each one of us can do our bit.

And so, as we celebrate this great man, let's try and honour him by following his example – one of dignity, of reconciliation and of service to this land and all her people.