

Fifth Sunday Per Annum (A)
February 9, 2017.

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden (Mt. 5:14)

Imagine the astonishment of those who heard these words for the very first time. Our Lord extended their importance to universal proportions; and yet He says the same of us and to us. We who listen to Him today, in this little town of ours are also engaged in a work whose proportion and scope is also universal. We are Catholic; and we are part of an enterprise of faith whose scope extends far beyond the limits even of time. *You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. (Mt. 5:14).* This city is the Church, established in the midst of the world and above the world. There is an ancient Christian document, the *Letter to Diognetus* which states in very clear terms: *What the soul is to the body; that Christians are to the world. It goes on to say: As the soul is present in every part of the body, while remaining distinct from it, so Christians are found in all the cities of the world, but cannot be identified with the world.... As the soul benefits from the deprivation of food and drink, so Christians flourish under persecution. Such is the Christian's lofty and divinely appointed function, from which he is not permitted to excuse himself.* These ancient words are no less relevant today. Last year, every six minutes a Christian was martyred for the Faith. Christians are today the most persecuted religious group in the world. We are not permitted to excuse ourselves from our function. We are not our own masters. The city that we inhabit is the City of God; and all nations stream to this city for strength, instruction and protection. And so Our Lord exhorts us: *Let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in Heaven (Mt. 5:16).*

This is a lofty calling and yet, we know that with the help of God's grace, it is possible for us to be faithful to what Our Lord calls us to be and to do. Our Lord calls us not only to be virtuous but to be the *salt*, that is, *to raise the level of flavor of every human activity and thus transform it. What is of itself insipid can be delightful if seasoned with joy and devotion. What would be irretrievably lost to the passage of time and decay can be preserved unto eternity in the Lord by the salt of Christian memory* (Erasmus Leiva-Merikakis, *Heart of the World*, Vol. 1, p. 205). There is no better way for as Catholics to transform ourselves and in turn, our world, than to permeate the whole of our lives with the *salt of Christian memory*. We do this principally in the liturgical year with its Feasts and commemorations, especially of the Saints. It is their precious memory that enables us to appreciate and defend Sacred Tradition as an indispensable element of our life.

A contemporary Quebec philosopher, (Mathieu Bock-Côté) has observed that *man without history, without culture, without country, without family and without civilization is not free: he is naked and condemned to despair* (http://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/politique/2016/04/29/31001-20160429ARTFIG00349-mathieu-bock-cote-l-homme-sans-civilisation-est-nu-et-condamne-au-desespoir.php?redirect_premium). As we face the challenges posed by a globalist worldview that either relativizes these realities or negates them altogether, it is understandable that we risk losing our unique identity and so fail in our obligation to be *the light of the world*. The Church has a history and a culture. It is a family that recognizes that every Catholic family is in fact a domestic church and this Church to which we are privileged to belong, has civilized the world by

example. This is why it is so important for us to be brutally honest about the forces at work both in the world and unfortunately, in the Church herself that would have us deny our traditions and teachings in the interests of relevance. A house divided against itself cannot stand (Cf. *Mk.* 3:25). We have absolutely no authority to change the traditional faith of the Church

There is great unrest in the world and the greater culture that we inhabit is obsessed with what it terms social justice. So called social justice warriors and their protests are increasingly a feature of public life. Among other issues they concern themselves with marriage and so called marriage equality, the nature of the human person and human sexuality, beginning and end-of-life issues. These are mistakenly labeled as social issues; whereas, in fact, these are overarching moral and theological concerns that impact not only on our human life but also our ultimate destiny, our salvation. If the Church, under pressure were to submit to these forces, the secular culture would triumph and we would cease to be the *city built on a hill*.

We live our lives in a triple dimension: physical, psychological and spiritual. *The dimension of a purely physical life makes us slaves to nature and all its demands: cold, heat, illness, instincts and death. The psychological dimension makes us subject to the highs and lows of feelings and sensations. We are never entirely free.* Yet, it is possible for us through discipline to control our physical demands and even our feelings. *If we live in the spiritual dimension, the soul transcends itself and reaches God. This is the life of pure faith, which leans on nothing other than God Himself.* (Don Divo Barsotti, <http://rorate-caeli.blogspot.com/2017/02/don-barsotti-soul-that-leans-on-god.html>). It is this life of *pure faith* that Our Lord is calling us to live and in so doing, *to raise the level of flavor of every human activity and thus transform it.* In this light, the natural bond of marriage become a sacramental sign of God's faithful love for His people, the gift of human sexuality is seen as sacred, suffering lovingly and patiently borne becomes co-redemptive and a participation in the Passion of Our Lord; and we *offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God*; this being our *true and proper worship*. So we do not conform ourselves to *the pattern of this world* but are transformed by the renewing of our mind (Cf. *Rom.* 12:1-2).

The *work of God* that engages us here in our common home and which permeates our lives in the world is indeed a unified whole of universal proportions. *You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden* (*Mt.* 5:14). Our sacrificial lives lived for the world's salvation are an exercise of our baptismal priesthood; so that as God's people we might *proclaim everywhere [His] mighty works, for [He] has called us out of darkness into [His] own wonderful light* (Preface I of the Sundays in Ordinary Time, *The Roman Missal*). This is our work; as it was the work of those who have gone before us and who in their turn, sanctified their own time and place. May the *salt of Christian memory* enable us also to sanctify our own days for the world's salvation.