

Light of the World
5th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
(Mt 5:13-16)

A saint is someone through whom the light of Christ shines before men, and others, seeing his good deeds, give glory to God. Mother Teresa was such a saint, who gave light to the world. As a Loretto sister teaching a girl's school in Calcutta, she was moved with compassion for the situation around her, where the elderly and dying were left in the gutter, literally to be "taken out with the trash." Dedicating herself to the corporal works of mercy, especially the holy work of "burying the dead" with dignity, she became world-famous. Others were attracted to the light that radiated from her, that could be seen in her person, in the joy of her community, in the love manifested to the poor.¹

St. Teresa of Calcutta illustrates in dramatic fashion the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: "*You are the light of the world.*" This is what it means to be a saint, to let Christ's light shine in the darkness of the world. Jesus wants all his followers to be such saints, it is our calling.

The most important thing to understand about this teaching, is that even though Jesus says, "*You are the light of the world,*" we are not in fact the light. Christ is the Light. "*I am the Light of the World*" (Jn 8:12). "*In him was life, and the life was the light of men, and the light shines in the darkness...*" (Jn 1:4-5). "*The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light...*" (Mt 4:16). "*A light of revelation to the gentiles, and glory of your people Israel...*" (Lk 2:32). Etc.

We must not make the mistake of Lucifer, whose name means "light." He was the greatest of all God's creatures, shining with a brilliance of glory that exceeded all other creatures in heaven. But he considered himself to be the light, and as a result his real truth had to be manifested: without God, he is prince of darkness.

No creature, no matter how great, is the light. But every creature is created for the light, to reflect the light. Mary speaks in the correct and humble way when she says, "*Magnificat anima mea Dominum,*" "My soul *magnifies* the Lord" (Lk 1:46). Our soul is like a lens, a crystal, a jewel, through which the grace of God is

¹ On at least one occasion, this light was manifested miraculously, when a documentary producer (Malcolm Muggeridge) noticed he did not require the usual studio lighting, when filming inside the home for the dying: "In the processed film, the part taken inside [the home] was bathed in a particularly beautiful soft light, whereas the part taken outside was rather dim and confused. I myself am absolutely convinced that the technically unaccountable light is, in fact, the Kindly Light [John Henry] Newman refers to in his well-known exquisite hymn - ... This love is luminous, like the haloes artists have seen and made visible round the heads of saints. I find it not at all surprising that the luminosity should register on a photographic film ... I am personally persuaded that Ken [MacMillan, the photographer] recorded the first authentic photographic miracle. It so delighted me that I fear that I talked and wrote about it to the point of tedium, and sometimes irritation." (Malcolm Muggeridge A Biography, p. 332)

meant to shine in splendor. The creature is not the light, but the creature is a conduit of the light.

A diamond, apart from the light, in the dark, is nothing more than a hard rock. What makes a diamond so precious and sought after as jewelry to enhance the beauty of the face, is the way it captures and reflects light. The light is the glory of a diamond, jewels exist to magnify the light.

Every one of God's spiritual creatures is beautiful because of the way they reflect the Light which is God Himself. It is for this purpose they were created. Each one is a unique reflection of God's glory. In the case of man, this glory of the soul is "hidden" in a body, but nevertheless it is God's intention that His glory and grace, present in the soul, be manifest through the body: beginning with the face (the eyes and smile are a "window to the soul") but above all in the "good works" performed through the body (Mt 5:16), known as the Corporal Works of Mercy.

Those who met Mother Teresa always commented how she radiated a divine beauty in her wrinkled face. But it was above all in the care she and her sisters manifested to the poor and the dying, that radiated the divine glory for all the world to see.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus lays out for us our Christian identity. We are to be the "light of the world," his light in the world. We must be true to our identity—we must "be" what God created us to be.

Baptism allows us to fulfill this Christian identity. It is the sacrament of light, of illumination. Prior to baptism, we are in darkness, like the devil. We lack God's light (called sanctifying grace) in the soul. This is the condition of Original Sin. By means of baptism, God enters the soul, making of it a Temple of the Holy Spirit. The liturgy of baptism culminates with the Light of Christ, when the godparents are presented the holy flame from the Easter candle on behalf of the infant: "Receive the Light of Christ." The priest then solemnly charges the parents and godparents to "keep this flame burning brightly" in the life of the child as he grows, not allowing sin or evil to compromise the new life of grace he has received by baptism.²

If we do not shine like Mother Teresa or the other great saints, it means aspects of our life are still in darkness, mired in the mud. We may yet be "diamonds in the rough," needing cutting and polishing. Sins of the flesh are like layers of dirt on the soul which obscure the light from shining. Sins of the soul

² Parents and godparents, this light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly. This child of yours has been enlightened by Christ. He is to walk always as a child of the light. May he keep the flame of faith alive in his heart. When the Lord comes, may he go out to meet him with all the saints in the heavenly kingdom.

such as the seven deadly sins are like cracks or cataracts deep within the soul which also render it opaque. Thus even though we may be in a state of grace, God's grace is still not able to fully shine because the soul is not yet pure and limpid.

The Scriptures tell us, "*The righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father*" (Mt 13:43), and "*Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever*" (Dn 12:3). We are in need of ongoing purification and conversion, a task that must be completed before we enter heaven. Whatever is not fulfilled in this life, will be undertaken in Purgatory. The great saints of the Church, such as Mother Teresa, and John Paul II, became pure vessels of God's grace already in this world, and it was literally visible in their person and in their works.

All are called to sainthood, to be fully the creature God intended when He created us. This is our fundamental mission, given at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. Let us take up the identity given us through baptism, the mission given us in the Sermon on the Mount – not simply to do good and great things, but to let God's great Goodness shine unimpeded in our soul.