

Jesus' message today is very simple: you are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. While these are simple words, they can shape the way we live our lives. To better understand what he is concretely asking of us, it can be helpful to delve into this image of the light.

If you have ever walked into a dark room, you know that you cannot see anything. It is only when light shines on a thing that we see it. It may be a bright light that lights up the whole room, or it could be a narrow shaft of light that lights up just a small object. The external source of light is important if something is going to be visible. So, when Jesus says, you are the light of the world, he is reminding us, above all, that there is a light that shines on us that makes us visible in a spiritual sense. That light is, of course, the radiance of God.

When we were baptised, we received a candle that had been lit from the paschal candle, we heard the words "Receive the light of Christ", and we were told to keep that light burning brightly. This command from our baptism, echoes Jesus' words in the gospel and calls us to concrete actions – what Jesus called good works.

In the biblical world, the life of faith became visible in those concrete actions and good works that Isaiah spoke about in our first reading. These were the actions and works that looked out for other people, particularly the needy. This is why Isaiah spoke about giving bread to the hungry, sheltering the homeless poor, and clothing those who had no clothes to keep them warm. Isaiah also called for changes in behaviour so that people didn't threaten others, or do violence to them, or treat them as though they were not human beings with equal dignity. As he gives these concrete examples, Isaiah reminds them that these are the actions that will allow their light to shine. But it wasn't just that their light would shine, but also that the glory of God would be visible. This is what Jesus is calling for when he tells the crowd that they are the light of the world.

Of course, Jesus himself is the model of what this looks like. We know, not just from his teaching, but especially from his miracles, that God and the kingdom of God became visible in such works as his healing of the leper, feeding of the crowds, casting out devils, or coming to the aid of a widow whose only son had just died. All of these actions, and the many others like them, were like a light shining in the world. These actions demonstrated the radiance of God,

and in doing so, they changed lives. When we are the light of the world, lives can also change; the world can change. But we have to be careful how we understand what is happening. It is not that we are changing the world. Rather, it is God who is changing the world, because if we are the light of the world, it is God who is the source of our light.

St Paul reflects on this in our second reading. He too focuses on the practical side of being a follower of Jesus. He says he is not interested in winning philosophical arguments. Rather, he relies on the power of God, which he calls a demonstration of the Spirit. It is also what Jesus calls being a light to the world and salt to the earth. Instead of our winning arguments, Paul wants the light of Christ to be reflected in our lives. It is these concrete actions and works such as responding to those in need, or deescalating violence, that show that lives can change, and the world can change. We undertake these concrete actions under the influence of the Holy Spirit and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

I think Paul is also reminding us to be careful about thinking that our lives are insignificant, or that we can't make much difference to the world or change people. In some sense, it is true that you and I are not going to change the world. But that is not the point of Jesus' saying about being the light of the world or salt of the earth. Rather, Paul is reminding us that God is at work in the world, and that God makes us beacons that allow his light to be seen. Whether our light is flooding a whole room or is a narrow beam that shines in a focused way, it is a demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit.

We can each individually apply Jesus' message to ourselves, and seek to live our lives as salt and light. But the message applies equally to the community and the church. A community that welcomes others, that reaches out to those in need, and that lives in harmony, will be a powerful beacon of light in a world that is often marked by self-centredness, violence, and polarisation.

This is our pilgrim way. May our witness give praise to our Father in heaven.