

We recall that when we were baptised, the light of Christ was entrusted to our parents and god-parents with these words: 'Receive the light of Christ...This light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly: These children of yours have been enlightened by Christ. They are to walk always as children of light. May they keep the flame of faith alive in their hearts.' By our baptism, we are called not just to walk as children of the light, **but to be children of light** and to bring that light into the darkness of our world. In defence of the early Christians, there was a second century philosopher, Aristides, who testifies how well the early Christian community reflected the light of Christ by the witness of their lives. Writing to the Emperor Hadrian, he states that: 'Christians love one another. They never fail to help widows; they save orphans from those who would hurt them. If one member of the community has something, he gives freely to those who have nothing. If they see a stranger, Christians take him home as though he were a real brother.... There is something divine in them.' Isaiah reminds us in the first reading: Share your bread with the hungry...clothe the man you see to be naked...turn not from your own kin...do away with the yoke, the clenched fist the wicked word... then your light will rise in the darkness and your shadows become like noon."

It is clear that the lives of the early Christians manifested what Paul in our second reading calls 'the demonstration of the power of the Spirit' (1 Cor 2:5). We might ask ourselves if that divine spark is still alive and evident in our communities today. Do our lives shine as brightly in our world as the lives of the early Christians did in the world of their time? Have we become like salt that has lost its taste? How well do we manifest 'the power of the Spirit' at work in us?

Reflecting upon Christians as salt and light, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council taught that "All Christians, wherever they live, by the content of their speech and the witness of their lives, must manifest the new person they put on in Baptism... so that others, seeing their good works, might glorify the Father and more perfectly perceive the true meaning of human life." To put on the mind of Christ from Baptism onwards is to receive a new lens by which to perceive reality, a new imagination with which to interpret it, a new language with which to speak of it. True Christians spice the world around them, rather than simply endorsing what's already there. The enemies of Christianity often appreciate this better than we do, which is why they press us to do little more than echo the wisdom of the age.

The Vatican Council went on to articulate, for the first time so clearly and authoritatively, the unique contribution of the lay people to the new evangelization: "Lay people are called above all to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where she cannot become salt of the earth unless by means of them." Salt preserves; salt flavours; and, thirdly, salt dissipates far and wide, affecting whatever it touches. Each of you has your particular dish, your own situation to flavour; without you, it may well not happen. In your homes, workplaces, friendships, in your political, cultural and leisure activities, in all the places you lead and serve, your presence is irreplaceable if the Gospel is to be seen, spoken, tasted. Only you can bring the teachings of Christ to bear on the activities and relationships in those places; only you can prepare the way for others there to encounter Jesus Christ. May you flavour all around you with the seasoning of Christian faith, hope and love!

Commenting on our gospel reading today and in the spirit of the first reading we heard, Pope Francis noted: "Of course, you may be wondering how long salt and light can last without running out if we continue to give ourselves relentlessly. That's where the power of God comes in because the Christian is salt and light given to us by God during Baptism, they are gifts that never end". We make our own the prayer of Pope: "May your light shine before men and women, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is heaven." ==

