

5A SML 2023
MT 5:13-16

The Catholic Church is sometimes praised for her opposition to the latest “ism” that modern society throws at us.

- ✓ Humanitarianism
- ✓ Modernism
- ✓ Relativism
- ✓ Individualism
- ✓ Humanism
- ✓ Spiritualism
- ✓ Idealism
- ✓ Rationalism
- ✓ Symbolism

In years gone by She condemned:

- ✓ Totalitarianism
- ✓ Nazism
- ✓ Fascism
- ✓ and Communism

Any “ism” that dismisses or ignores the Church is really indirect praise. It pays the beautiful tribute of opposition. If it directed no arrows against Her shields, then the Church would know that:

- ✓ Her faith had faltered,
- ✓ Her fires had gone out and
- ✓ Her salt had lost its savor.

You are the light of the world.

You are the salt of the earth.

By way of example, I'd like to compare to biblical characters and the comparison is not mine. It comes from The Chosen, and you do not need to be at all familiar with The Chosen to understand. Let's compare the biblical characters of Simon the Zealot, who later became an Apostle and the lame man healed at the pool of Bethesda.

Simon the Zealot put all his energy into being zealous, hence his name. He did nothing else but physically trained to cleanse Jerusalem of anything not Jewish, and if that included slitting a Roman throat, so be it. Until Simon found his hope in Someone who was not zealous.

At the other end of the spectrum was the lame man who was helpless for 38 years at the pagan pool of Bethesda. For 38 years, he did his best to be the first in the waters when they stirred, but his best was fruitless, because those waters never

healed anyone. He was helpless, until He found his hope in Someone who was not helpless.

Zealous. Helpless. Neither the right kind of fire nor the right kind of salt. So what IS the right kind of fire and the right kind of salt?

His Holiness Pope Francis answers this question by denouncing “selfish acedia.” Acedia or sloth is a sickness of the soul that is expressed in:

- ✓ boredom
- ✓ distaste for prayer
- ✓ slackening or abandoning penitential practices
- ✓ reducing the Mass to when it’s convenient,
- ✓ and indifference toward the sacraments.

These symptoms are often a passing trial, says Francis, but sloth can lead to genuine spiritual apathy because sloth is one of the seven capital sins. Francis said this:

What other explanation is there for the collapse of the Church’s evangelization efforts, if not the self-centeredness and complacency of our hearts? Christians have the vocation to become the salt and light of the world. Nowhere in the Gospel is it written that we were supposed to keep the Word of God [to ourselves], for our

own personal convenience. Selfish flight and a lack of generosity often conceal a lack of maturity and a very impoverished vision of human nature.

Francis particularly lectures his priests and religious who build for themselves a comfortable secure world but never run the risk of responding even to the call of their priesthood. The priest who is stingy with the time he spends with his flock is going through a real spiritually slothful storm.

St. Augustine wrote this:

But let us continue on our way, and continue without sloth or respite, so that we may ultimately arrive at our destination.

For priests, religious and laity, the answer to being the salt of the earth and light of the world is the necessity of keeping the faith perspective. The Apostles faced multiple uncertainties and they understood that they had to go forward without turning back. Christians are called to abandon themselves into the hands of God, who is the true Teacher of evangelization.

Rather than zealotry and apathy, St. Cyril of Jerusalem offers righteousness and endurance. Cyril wrote:

With respect to weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left, in glory and dishonor, this Church in earlier days, when persecution and afflictions abounded,

crowned her holy martyrs with the varied and many flowered wreaths of endurance.

Francis says to be salt and light, we must stay the course of hope in God. Yahweh urged His people to leave Egypt so as to set out for the Promised Land. But in the desert, some wanted to go back, not so much for the nostalgia for the “fish, the cucumbers and the onions,” and but especially out of fear of crossing through large spaces that were so inhospitable, but Moses encouraged his brethren not to doubt God and keep the faith.

We need to do the same. Eternal hope. Eternal optimism. And we do not need to be fluent in the faith to be salt and light. Francis says being optimistic does not prevent us from being clear-sighted. Quoting Our Holy Father:

I think of the steadfast faith of those mothers tending their sick children who, though perhaps barely familiar with the articles of the creed, cling to a Rosary.

A little closer to home. Last summer, a woman in Medford Lakes called for her friend, whom she described as a non-practicing Methodist. She was on hospice and asked me to their home so she could receive the Last Rites. I explained to

her I couldn't administer Last Rites because she was not Catholic, but I would be very willing to come to the home and:

- ✓ talk with her,
- ✓ pray with her,
- ✓ give her a blessing yada yada.

The woman said, "Yes. Please come." Here were two women, neither one Catholic, who did not know what Last Rites was, but knew the Catholic Church had something at the time of death that they wanted. And so I went and spent some time readying the dying woman for the Lord to come to her. Salt and light.

We need to do the same. We were never meant to keep the faith to ourselves. We need to invite. Invite others to SML: to Mass, to a parish event, I don't care. Just invite. Invite everyone you can. As Jesus said in "The Chosen" to Simon who had just called to be a fisher of men. "Invite everyone you find. I'll sort them out later."