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Salt and light

Mary McGlone | Feb. 8, 2014 Spiritual Reflections

What do this Sunday's readings say to us today? Where are we to look for the light of our world?

In our first reading, Isaiah's solution to superficial religiosity that does not illuminate has nothing to do with more prayers or pious self-mortification; he beckons us to venture beyond our comfortable home territory into the foreign lands of the less fortunate. Isaiah teaches that our light will shine when it has been kindled by the experience of sharing with those who know needs we have not experienced and that we can't even imagine without listening to their story.

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 58:7-10
Psalm 112
1 Corinthians 2:1-5
Matthew 5:13-16

Paul (second reading) presents himself simply, hoping to lure us away from the complexities that distract and clutter our approach to faith. He cares not if we label ourselves conservative or liberal, fans of Francis more than John Paul II, or vice versa. Heated arguments about translations or the language we use for prayer would prompt him to deliver a thundering harangue about worship that does us more harm than good (1 Corinthians 11:17-19). Paul's concern is that we know Christ, and the only way to get there is through knowing his cross and all its weakness. It is only through the cross that the power of God shines forth and transforms people into salt for the world.

If we hope to understand the message of these readings, we need to seek out those whom Jesus labeled as light for the world (Gospel). Today, one of those people could well be Archbishop Amel Shamon Nona of Mosul, Iraq. He was named archbishop after his predecessor was tortured and killed. The day after he arrived in Mosul, a man with whom he was praying was martyred.

Speaking to his threatened people in October 2013, Nona encouraged them to discover the highest expression of their faith "as revealed by the Incarnation." That, he said, is what will prepare them to "be willing to endure absolutely anything ... even if this means having to die in its cause." A living belief in God's presence in and among them will make them a light in the darkness of their world.

One would almost think that the archbishop was preaching on these readings as he wrote to those who wish to support their persecuted sisters and brothers:

"The most powerful thing you can do in response to our situation is to rediscover and forge unity -- personally and as a community -- and to work for the good of your own societies. They are in great need of the witness of Christians who live out their faith with a strength and joy that can give others the courage of faith."

Christians are called to be light and salt for our world. Some offer a unique testimony through faithfulness in the face of persecution. All of us are called to break bread together, to believe in and work for unity, and to risk solidarity with those who are facing persecution for Jesus' sake. We will offer salt and light when we live, in the words of Nona, seasoned with the "strength and joy that encourages others."

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