Homily for the Fifth Sunday in Ordinary time 2026 Year A

The theme of today's readings is very much about the necessity of witnessing to one's faith. Jesus uses the metaphors of salt and light, salt preserves and flavours, light illuminates. The Christian has a specific role, to contribute to the quality of life in the society in which he or she lives.

Well, that is easy to say, but the plain fact of the matter is that not everybody is prepared to allow the Church or one individual a voice in certain areas of life; the Church or the Christian is accused of interfering if they dare to speak in the areas of, say, politics, finance, or education.

In the pluralistic society that we live in today, life has become compartmentalised, and each compartment is highly specialized and only the expert in that particular field dare voice an opinion; anybody else is accused of not knowing what they are talking about.

Whilst that may be true of technicalities there is an area which we call ethics or morality, which is concerned about the rightness or wrongness of a particular act, theory or policy and it is in that that we have a moral obligation to act or speak out.

But would that it was that straight forward! The pluralism of society is also reflected in a pluralism among Christians themselves; there are areas of morality where Christians disagree about the rightness and wrongness of things. Life itself has become so complex that it is hard to evaluate a problem in terms of black and white because there are so many grey areas in-between.

So, what is the Christian to do?

I think at the very least, we should acknowledge certain basic principles.

1. You cannot live life forever sitting on a fence in a state of perpetual indecisiveness or having other people always making up your mind for you. We must dare to be prepared to live out the consequences of our decisions. Sometimes we will make mistakes, but hopefully it will never be so serious that we are not able to learn from those mistakes.

2. If we are going to make responsible choices about the rightness or wrongness of something, then we should be prepared to take the time and the

trouble to educate and inform our consciences about the issues involved, and not just come up with an emotional gut reaction to a problem. It may prove to be the correct decision in the end, but it is not a very sound way of living one's life, let alone living with other people.

3. We are Christians and followers of Jesus, and we belong to the community called the Catholic Church. The Church provides us with a body of moral guidelines that is the distilled wisdom and experience of over 2000 years, and it is still developing. We all have a part to play in that development. We are free in conscience to disagree with any aspect of the Church's teaching, but our sincere conscience must be an informed conscience. We need to know not only what the Church teaches us but how and why the Church arrives at that position. There is much more room for flexibility on making moral choices than we are often aware of. To make a moral choice takes a fair amount of courage, be that to agree or even to disagree with the Church's teaching. Ideally we will always make the right choice and for the right reasons, but sometimes we end up making the wrong choice for what seemed to be the right reasons, or even the right choice for what might be the wrong reason.

4. Because it is a pluralistic society with people of differing faiths, or even no faith at all, we cannot impose our own moral standards upon others in a dogmatic way; but that does not mean that we should do nothing. We bear witness to our faith and contribute to the debate by politely and firmly stating what we believe in, whether something is right or wrong, but we cannot impose those values on somebody else and there is no area of life which is beyond moral criticism. It is sometimes the harsh and judgmental way that we state our positions that closes people's minds to them.

5. Because we respect other people's freedom to make their own moral choices that does not mean that the way we all come to make our choices are of equal value.

6. The best and most persuasive moral argument is personal example; all the other verbal arguments and explanations may go in one ear and out the other, but you cannot ignore the moral authority that shines out of a person who lives by the standards and values that they profess to believe in; they practice what they preach.

We live in times of huge moral confusion. Values have been turned upside down, and people have lost a sense of what is sinful. They no longer have the ability to know or even care about the difference between what is right and what is wrong.

It is an age that needs clarity of vision and strong moral leadership, and each one of us as a Christian has a lot to contribute; be it in the public arena or where we work or perhaps in the privacy of the family home we should not abdicate that responsibility.

There is always the great temptation to give in to the feeling of cynicism or even sheer impotence in the face of the problem, ' Everybody is doing it so why shouldn't I? My stand won't make any difference'. That is moral despair, or moral cowardice. We don't live life in a moral vacuum; all our decisions and acts have consequences.

The way we choose to live our lives, the things that we do or shy away from doing inevitably affects those about us. We should try to live good moral lives, no matter what the world about us chooses to do. If we are to be a light in the darkness then that implies that there is moral darkness or blindness around us. There is, but there is also an enormous potential for goodness. People just have to be shown what is possible and how to reach out for it.

We are learning painful but timely lessons now; that promiscuity is not real freedom; that a healthy life is a disciplined one and that an important part of that is self-discipline. Moral structures and guidelines don't inhibit human development but rather guarantee it.

And as a Christian we have our own role to play and our own valuable insights and experience to give. We start with ourselves; you cannot give what you haven't got - if our own salt has no flavour how can it preserve or season something else? If our lamps are not lit they cannot give light. It is only when we live by the values which we, perhaps painfully, have grown to love, that we humbly offer to share them with others.