

(English translation)

Rocca di Papa, 28 marzo 1979

Word of Life

“Your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father” (Mt 5:16).

If you are a believer, you have an obligation to fulfil for other people, who do not know God.

In fact, Christians cannot escape or hide themselves from the world, nor consider religion a private matter.

They live in the world because they have a responsibility, a mission to fulfil before all people: to be the light that shines.

You too, have this task, and if you do not perform it, you are useless as salt that has lost its taste or a light that is hidden.

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This light is seen through your good works. It shines through the love radiated by Christians to all other people.

Perhaps you'll tell me: but Christians are not the only ones who do good works. There are others who work for progress, establish charitable institutions, promote justice and do many good things.

You are right. Certainly, Christians do these things too, but this is not a Christian's specific function. Christians must bring a new spirit into the good works they perform, which means it is no longer they that live in them, but Christ in them.

In fact, when St. Matthew wrote this, he was not thinking merely of isolated acts of charity such as visiting prisoners, clothing the naked and the many other works of mercy done to meet people's needs. Rather, he was thinking of a Christian's total commitment to the will of God, in such a way that his or her entire life becomes a continuous series of good works.

If Christians do this, they become “transparent,” and the praise given for whatever they had done will not go to them, but to Christ in them, and through them God becomes present in the world. The Christian's task, therefore, is to let this light that dwells within them radiate out so that it can be a sign of this presence of God among men and women.

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If good works performed by individual believers have this character, then the Christian community in the midst of the world must have a similar specific task. That task is to reveal, through its communal life, the presence of God that is manifested where two or three are united in his name, the presence promised to the Church until the end of time.

The early Church gave great emphasis to these words of Jesus. Especially in difficult times, when the Christians were facing persecution and being maligned, the Church urged them not to react with violence. Their behavior had to be the best refutation of the evil spoken against them.

St. Paul's letter to Titus reads, “Urge the younger men, similarly, to control themselves, showing yourself as a model of good deeds in every respect, with integrity in your teaching, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be criticized, so that the opponent will be put to shame without anything bad to say about us” (Titus 2: 6-8).

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This is an experience of Christian life that even today is a light that shines out and leads men and women to God.

Let me tell you a story.

Antoinette was a girl who left Sardinia in order to find work in France, in Grenoble. She found a job in an office, but it was a place where most of the other workers did not want to do the work. Since she was a Christian and saw in every person Jesus to be served, she helped everyone and was always calm and smiling. Oftentimes the others would get angry and take it out on her, saying in loud, mocking voices, “Since you like to work, take this and do my typing also.”

She remained calm and at peace, and worked on. She knew that they were basically not bad people. They probably all had troubles of their own.

One day, when the others were not around her, her boss approached and said: “Now you have to tell me. How come you never lose your patience, and why you are always smiling?”

Antoinette tried to evade the question by saying, “I simply try to stay calm and see the positive side of things.”

The boss banged his fist on the desk and exclaimed, “No, God certainly is involved here! Otherwise it would be impossible! And to think that I never believed in God!”

A few days later, Antoinette was called in by the director. She was told that she would be transferred to another office, the director explained, “so that you may transform it the same way you did the office you’re in now.”

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