

May 12, 2019 Do You Have A Light Homily: In the days of my youth, I was raised on a steady diet of television dramas and comedies, and scores of motion pictures. It was not uncommon for one question to turn up in many of the stories. Perhaps you may remember it. "Do you have a light?" The reference is to the light of a fire of a cigarette lighter or a match stick. Asking for a light was not an unusual request years ago when so many Americans smoked. Indeed, my late mother, who smoked cigarettes, often asked for a light from neighbors and friends. To be the bearer of light, even if it is a single flame, is to be at the possible service of those in need of a light. Alas, it is a light that soon vanishes.

While in Pisidia, Paul and his companions go to the local synagogue on the Sabbath. The synagogue is the house of prayer where Jews pray and hear the Word of God proclaimed. Today's first reading (Acts 13:1, 2, 43-52) records the first of St. Paul's three great speeches he makes in the course of his missionary career as portrayed in the Acts of the Apostles. His primary focus is the Passion and glorious Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Although Paul had some early success, not all of his contemporaries embraced his message. The majority of his Jewish listeners rejected him and his message. They then begin a smear campaign against him. "They stirred up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them from their territory." (Acts 13:50)

Paul now turns to the Gentiles. Paul quotes a passage from the Book of the prophet Isaiah in support of his decision to speak to those outside the Jewish fold. "I have made you a light to the Gentiles that you may be an instrument of salvation to the ends of the earth." (Is.49:6) Paul and Barnabas apply the prophecy to themselves because they are conscious of their mandate to speak in the name of Christ and on his authority. Clearly, this is a major turning point in the history of salvation. God's plan is not just for the Chosen People, the Jews, but also for the reconciliation and salvation of the entire human race. The Gentiles of Pisidia receive the Word with joy and thanksgiving. (Acts 13:48)

It is interesting to note that when the bishops of the world gathered in Rome for the Second Vatican Council in 1962, a large number of nations were represented. Nearly two thousand years after Paul's memorable discourse in a Jewish house of worship the Church had seen explosive growth. Indeed, one of the documents of the council is "Lumen Gentium", meaning a Light to the Nations.

Of course, there can be no guarantee of success whenever and wherever the Word of God is preached but the Word must be proclaimed whether people hear or refuse to hear the message of salvation. We must never give in to discouragement or, even worse despair. When the gospel is rejected in one place, history shows that it is carried to another place, and begins to bear fruit. The church has experienced explosive growth in Africa the last one hundred years whereas in Western Europe the Church is moribund and fading fast.

We are bearers of a light that will never be extinguished. Christ is our Light. In Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, he declares to his disciples, "You are the Light of the world". (Mt.5:14) We carry the flame of Christ in our hearts. In our secular culture too often we are unable to distinguish light from darkness. Only recently, the New York State legislature passed a bill legalizing infanticide. One of the elected officials who voted in favor of the bill dismissed the concerns of pro-life citizens by remarking, "After

all”, she stated, “The fetus is not human”. Walking in darkness usually results in tragedy. And the tragedy is the death of the soul.

The late Fr. Stanley Jaki, a Benedictine priest and philosopher of science, bemoaned the enveloping gloom of the western world. His words are worth repeating. “Since the invention of the electric bulb in the late 1870’s almost each decade became bathed with a novel form of artificial illumination. Floodlights can now create the impression of daylight during night. The marketing of merchandise makes much of ever shinier wrappings .The television floods with brilliant colors every nook and cranny even in the farthest corners of the world. Light dominates everywhere and creates the illusion that man has gained power over darkness. Yet where it counts most, in the inner world of man, darkness keeps thickening.”

If a Christian were asked today the question, “Do you have a light?” the appropriate response would be in the affirmative. Even a flicker of light can bring hope in a time of enveloping darkness. Let us recall the words of Christ from His magnificent Sermon on the Mount, “Your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father”. (Mt.5:16)

The flame of a matchstick vanishes in a short time. The Eternal flame of Christ burns always, and is never extinguished.

Amen!