

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time: We Are Salt and Light to the World

Isaiah 58:7-10; Psalm 112:4-5,6-7,8-9; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; Matthew 5:13-16

Dear CCST family and friends,

"You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world."

Our Lord Jesús was emphatic in saying, "you are," not "you will be." So the metaphors of salt and light are insightful reminders and thought-provoking representations of who we are as Christians. They follow immediately after the Sermon on the Mount or the Beatitudes, the Gospel we heard last Sunday. As if to tell us how his followers will become when they fully embrace the spirit of the Beatitudes -- those they encounter will taste their goodness and see the good news in their being before their words!

Salt is sodium chloride, a steady compound used to flavor food, and is necessary to preserve meat since bacteria will not thrive in the presence of a high amount of it. In ancient times, salt was a valuable commodity and was not easy to get. It's used as a form of payment to the Roman soldiers of their service called in Latin "salarium," from which the word "salary" came. Hence, we have the idiomatic expression, "hard workers are worth their salt." It means that when individuals are good at their job, they deserve reasonable compensation.

The metaphor "you are the salt of the earth" implies that just as salt enhances the flavor of anything it touches and preserves food, the followers of Jesus will naturally enhance the environment everywhere they go and serve as valuable moral ferment for a humane and stable society by living out the virtues indicated in the Beatitudes.

On the other hand, the metaphor, "you are the light of the world," tells us that our faith can never be a private affair as if hidden under a basket; unless people can see our faith reflected in our lives, the faith that we celebrate and proclaim is just a performance. It is a similar reminder of how we understand our worship, the Holy Eucharist. We live what we worship -- *Lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*. As we worship, so we believe, and so we live. Our worship is not an "add-on" for a Catholic Christian, and it is the foundation of Catholic identity, expressing our highest purpose.

In truth, we are bearers and mirrors of the light of Jesus, and God never puts us in a space too small to grow in. We may be like little candles; no matter how small our light is, we can dispel the darkness by God's grace. It is because the light that we receive is from God. Remember, during the rite of the Sacrament of Baptism, the priest says, "Receive the light of Christ! Parents and godparents, this light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly. This child of yours has been enlightened by Christ. He (she) is to walk always as a child of the light. May he (she) keep the flame of faith alive in his (her) heart. When the Lord comes, may he (she) go out to meet him with all the saints in the Heavenly Kingdom."

The light that penetrates within our hearts and stays with us is the light that comes out to shine from within because of our encounter with Jesus. His light increases when our ego decreases, and the opposite is true; when one's ego increases, the light of our Lord diminishes. It is because our encounter with the Lord is interior or internal and has to be accepted by faith. Remember, we renew this during the Easter Vigil. While holding a candle, we renounced Satan and his works and promised to serve God in the holy Catholic Church. We are asked: "Do you renounce Satan? I do. And all his works? I do. And all his empty show? I do."

If we renounce Satan, we hate the works of darkness and shall live in the light!

Some of the practical examples of being salt and light to the world are mentioned by Prophet Isaiah and St. Paul. Prophet Isaiah points out that one's work of justice and charity can serve as the light. He says, "If you remove from your midst oppression, false accusations, and malicious speech; if you bestow your bread on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted, then light shall rise for you in the darkness, and the gloom shall become for you like midday" (Is 58, 9b-10). St. Paul, on the other hand, expresses that his preaching and witness to faith rest

not on human wisdom but on the power of God. He acknowledged his weakness, fear, and much trembling when he came to the community of Corinth (cf. 1 Cor. 2:4-5). He resolved to leave behind being a knowledgeable Pharisee and only to bring with him the testimony of his faith in the crucified Lord Jesus, who died for our sins and is risen from the dead. His disposition reminds us that dependence on God's grace and humble witness are foundational to being salt and light to the world. That is, through one's prayer life, union with Jesus, and the ability to humbly be in touch with one's weakness. Without a life of prayer and the ability to publicly acknowledge one's sins, one cannot attend salvation nor proclaim Christ.

"You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world!" This is who we are by the grace of the Sacrament of Baptism. We are inserted in the family life of the Holy Trinity and sharers of the light of the risen Lord. It is an ongoing and interior decision of faith that does not end in ourselves. Our lives as salt and light lead others to give glory to God. Metaphorically speaking, it is in our spiritual DNA to bring "flavor" to our relationships and encounters with our family, friends, and community through acts of kindness and charity. It is in our spiritual DNA to be the bringer of good news rather than the cause of darkness to others. However we could be successful at some point, but our attitude and action could cause saltiness and darkness that's no longer glorifying God but oneself.

I remember driving a car on the road with my nephew; suddenly, a vehicle recklessly cut off in front of me. I was so upset that I cursed the driver of the car. And my nephew immediately commented, he said: "uncle, you are a priest." While the driver was wrong, my nephew was correct. It was a call of the innocent that brought me back to the awareness of whom I ought to be, which I should never take lightly.

Yes, we don't take the words of our Lord Jesus lightly. You are the salt of the earth because it is who Jesus is to you! You are the light of the world because it is who Jesus is to you.

Lord, You are the salt and the light to us and the world. Please help us be like you and save us when our lives become tasteless and dark. Amen.

God bless you.

Fr. Manny Hewe
Pastor