

Homily of Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year, A 2026

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

Jesus says in today's gospel, "You are the salt of the earth." Salt is very essential to human's health. Lack of it adversely affects the functioning of body cells, nerves, muscles, and bones. Salt is used to season food to enhance flavor and taste. Before the invention of fridges and freezers, salt was an important preserving agent. It is widely believed that salt was the oldest method of food preservation. Salt has played a great role in medicine since the beginning of humankind. Salt is used for cleaning, washing, sanitizing, purifying, and disinfecting. The importance of salt to humanity must be the reason Jesus calls his followers the salt of the earth, because they are to perform the functions of salt to the world.

The Bible gives a good example of the purifying power of salt: *"Once the inhabitants of the city complained to Elisha, 'The site of the city is fine indeed, as my lord can see, but the water is bad and the land unfruitful.' 'Bring me a new bowl,' Elisha said, 'and put salt in it.' When they had brought it to him, he went out to the spring and threw salt into it, saying, 'Thus says the Lord, 'I have purified this water. Never again shall death or miscarriage spring from it.' And the water has stayed pure even to this day, just as Elisha prophesied"* (2 King 2:19-22). This passage helps us to understand why we bless salt and water.

In today's Gospel Acclamation, Jesus says about himself, "I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will have the light of life" (John 8:12). Then, in the gospel reading, Jesus tells us, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father." It is very striking that what Jesus says about himself, he also says about us.

We are supposed to be lights that reflect the glory of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). As we see in the second reading, St. Paul reflected the light of Christ to the Corinthians. He reflected the light of Christ not with human wisdom but with a demonstration of Spirit and power of God. St. Paul said to the Corinthians, "For I have resolved to know nothing [that is to pay attention to nothing] while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). St. Paul was so resolute in his discipleship that he said to the Corinthians, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ [that is, follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ]" (1 Corinthians 11:1).

None of us can claim this level of resoluteness. Human wisdom or human thinking and desires hinder our lights from shining with Spirit and power of God. We may not be like St. Paul but there is much we can do. The first reading gives us a good insight of how we can be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. We are to feed the hungry, shelter the oppressed and homeless, cloth the naked, and attend to the afflicted.

Around us are people who need our help, love, care, and support. They are the elderly, the lonely, the sick, the troubled, the grieving, the hungry, the deprived, the incapacitated, the wounded, the oppressed, the heartbroken, the poor, the abandoned and so on. For some of these people, life is tasteless. As salt, we are to bring flavor to their life. Some of them see only darkness and hopelessness around them. As light, we are to light up their darkness and restore their hope. We lose our saltiness and our flame when we have become numb to other people's afflictions and sufferings. May our salt not lose its flavor, and may our light not go out.

The first reading encourages us that in relating with one another, we are to remove from our midst oppression, false accusation, and malicious speech. We are to support and encourage one another. We are not to discourage and pull down one another. We are not to blow out or put out anyone's light.

Let us conclude with a prayer for God's blessings in the first reading:

"... your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your wound shall quickly be healed.

Your vindication shall go before you, and the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.

... you shall call, and the Lord will answer, you shall cry for help, and he will say: 'Here I am!'

... your light shall rise in the darkness, and your gloom shall become like midday." Amen.

(Isaiah 58:8-10).

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