



The 5TH Sunday of Ordinary Time (A) – Feb 5, 2023

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

Question of the Week: *How are you a light to others?*

• **First Reading: Isaiah 58: 7-10**

...do not turn your back on your own

• **Responsorial: Psalm 112: 4-9**

R: The just man is a light in darkness to the upright.

• **Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 2: 1-5**

I came to you ... so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God

• **Gospel: Matthew 5: 13-16**

"You are the salt of the earth"

Reading 1: Let Your Light Shine!

Q: What discourages you? How do you fight against discouragement?

These verses came from the so-called Third Isaiah. Unlike Isaiah (chapters 1-39) written the late seventh century B.C., and Second Isaiah (chapters 40-55) written during the end of the Babylonian exile (mid-fifth century B.C.), this last section (chapters 56-66) were composed for those rebuilding Jerusalem (late fifth century B.C.). The exiles had returned from Babylon. The euphoria of the homecoming had worn off. Now the hard work and drudgery of city renewal laid heavy on the citizens. A malaise crept in. These final ten chapters addressed the lax attitudes of the community.

Popular pious practices became a chance for community-wide self-pity. Such wallowing would not do! (See Isaiah 58:3-5) In the midst of a diatribe against cultural fasting, Third Isaiah asked a simple question. What was the true spirit of fasting? To give up food and goods for the needy. [58:7]. In the concern for neighbor, the

faithful would shine. Then, God would be present to his people, hear their prayer, and heal the wound of the broken city. [58:8-9a] Stop the "poor me" attitude, the finger pointing, and backbiting. [58:9b]. Then the gloom and darkness of depression will seem like the noon! [58:10]

Third Isaiah pointed to positive attitude and charitable action as the ways to shine. Should we not do the same?

Q: How can you let your light shine? Or, how can you let God shine through you?

Responsorial: The Blessings of the Righteous

Q: How has God blessed you in this life?

While we might hate to admit it, we do measure the blessings of the God in the present life. This notion cuts against what we were taught by the Gospels, but we naturally measure God's goodness by what we experience. How do I know



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God loves me? Look at my house, my car, or my checkbook. Look at my good-looking spouse, my attractive, successful children, my wide range of friends. Don't the "televangelists" wear the expensive suits, the jewelry and the trophy spouse? Why shouldn't I?

Of course, this is a short sighted, immature measure of God's blessings. His providence stretches far beyond the material and the visible. His expectations demand much more of us than pride of ownership. The blessed may or may not have wealth, family, or reputation. But they do have one thing in common: a call to right living, an invitation to share blessings freely with others. This insight is at the heart of Psalm 112. In this way, one's righteousness, a true blessing of God, will last forever.

Psalm 112:1-3 defined the blessed in the Hebrew community. The blessed was the faithful, prayerful man who experienced the fruits of the Abrahamic covenant. He was prolific and counted his wealth within his family (whether he had possessions or not). His faithfulness to his Torah duties and his reputation lived beyond his death, not only through his clan, but also through the will of God.

The presence of YHWH (the light of 112:4a) showed the way with "gracious, merciful, and righteous." So the blessed were called to give graciously, as God gives. The imitation of the divine maintained one's call for judgment and his demeanor. Not only God's blessing, but the blessed self-giving was a reason for his eternal remembrance.

112:7-9 recapitulated the themes of 112:4-6: an inner peace based in a trust of God, calm in the face of adversaries, and a generous heart. Not only would the righteous man be remembered forever, his reputation would be truly honored (his call through a ram's horn would proclaim the man's true character).

112:10 was the counter theme to the rest of the psalm. The righteous, the man who placed his faith in YHWH and gave freely to others, would stand with God. The selfish who denied God and others would see only misery; their plans and deeds would come to naught.

Clearly, this psalm was written before the concept of the resurrection took root in Judaism. But the immortality of one's reputation foreshadowed the belief in eternal life with God. Such a life is the ultimate blessing, far greater than mere standing in the memory of others.

Q: How do you see your blessings from God? Are they the blessings that will last through eternity?

Reading 2: Ambition vs. Calling

Q: What would you like to accomplish in the near future?

All of us like to hear a great speaker, a person who can instruct, entertain, and enlighten all at the same time. Many times we have high expectations when we go to see a well-known speaker. And, many times we come away from a talk disappointed. The speaker might not have fulfilled all three criteria for a good presentation.

Imagine if a speaker was proud of the fact he was not inspirational or entertaining. Paul was. In fact, Paul claimed he was not good at delivery, nor did he claim to have great insight. (We do not know if Paul was a good orator, but he was very insightful. So his claims were far too modest for his ability!) Instead, Paul insisted his ministry and message were based on the activity of God. Such a claim was rooted in his calling. Paul did not aspire to preaching; he claimed it was God's will for him. Indeed, his charism might not have laid in oral delivery but in the work of the Spirit (healing, speaking in tongues, prophecy, etc.) Nevertheless, Paul held he did not try to promote himself. He always preached "Jesus Christ and him crucified."



Some share their faith ("Jesus" small talk or the jewelry they wear) as a form of self-promotion. They would like known as "good" Christians. Others share their faith from their hearts. The former share what they want others to know about them. The latter share what they think others need to hear. Some use Jesus as a means of self-promotion. Others promote Jesus. Depth and sincerity really reveal the intention of the person who shares their faith.

Pray God will lead you as your share his message.

Q: Have you prayed God will use you this day? How do you think God will use you to achieve his ends?

Gospel: Salt and Light

Q: What are the differences between the leader and the follower? When does a follower lead?

The path to leadership is a hard one. True leaders are committed to a goal or a cause. They are also willing to sacrifice time, talent, and treasure for their passion. They gather as many followers by their example as by their ideals. In fact, many measure leaders' goals and passion by their example. Do they merely talk? Or are they willing to walk the path?

In one sense, a follower becomes a leader the moment he or she makes a commitment beyond the norm. At that point, the easy way becomes difficult. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus honored his followers who took the hard way, those who lived out the Beatitudes. Those who sacrificed for the Kingdom would be the salt of the earth and light to the world.

In Matthew, Jesus used two images to stress the Kingdom: salt and light. Both point to the example of the follower and its consequences.

5:13 The properties of salt make this verse difficult to translate. Salt has various uses: a sea-

soning, a preservative, and an ingredient for fuel (see commentary below). Because of this variety, Matthew may have even used the various images of salt to jump from theme to theme. As salt seasoned and preserved food, and as it keeps a fire burning in an even, extended manner, the disciples were to improve the tone of society ("season" it), preserve faith, and extend the fire of the Spirit through their evangelization efforts. The translations of "weakened" and "become salt" were deliberately vague because of this fact.

"...of the earth." Here, the term "earth" could mean God's promised land to Israel. Or, it could also refer to those Jews living in the Diaspora. Hence, it could refer to the land or the people (or both!). Unlike the modern western mentality which sees the earth as morally neutral, the contemporaries of Jesus connected the God's blessing upon the people to the land. Evangelization was a means to communicate God's blessing to his people. Even the land would reap a reward for their efforts.

5:15 "basket" is literally "bushel," a Latin measure of grain. Matthew obviously referred to the container that measured the grain.

"those in the house" Contemporaries of Jesus lived in one room dwellings. Hence, a single lamp could well light a house.

5:16 "good works" What good works were the disciples to perform? Three areas come to mind: evangelization, miracles, and works that exceeded those of the Pharisees. Since Matthew wrote for a Jewish-Christian audience that may have kept the Law, his stress had to go beyond the everyday expectations of Palestinian culture. Simply keeping the Law (even in the strict manner of the Pharisees) would not cause others to notice.

In 5:13, the salt referred to the leveling agent for paddies made from animal manure, the fuel for outdoor ovens used in the time of Jesus. Young



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family members would form paddies with animal dung, mix in salt from a salt block into the paddies, and let the paddies dry in the sun. When the fuel paddies were light in an oven, the mixed-in salt would help the paddies burn longer, with a more even heat. When the family spent the salt block, they would throw it out onto the road to harden a muddy surface.

Jesus saw his followers as leveling agents in an impure world. Their example would keep the fire of faith alive even under stress. Their example would spread faith to those mired in the cultural "dung." But if their example rang empty, they were worthless; they would be dug into the mud under the heels of critics. [5:13]

Jesus also saw his followers as the light of a fire to the world. Placing a light fire under a basket would put the fire out. No, like a city high on a hill, the fire should be placed for all to see. So, one cannot hide faith by inaction. One must show faith in action for all to see, so those seeing the witness can be brought to faith and praise God. [5:14-16].

In essence, Jesus told his followers they cannot have it both ways. One cannot believe as a Christian, yet act as if faith did not matter. Faith leads to action and the action points to the Kingdom.

Catechism Theme: The Lay Faithful (897-913)

How can we be salt of the earth and light to the world? How can our example make a difference at home, in school, at work? We answer the challenge these questions present when we share in Christ's ministry as priest, prophet, and king.

As priest, Christ offered a sacrifice of love to the Father. What sacrifices of love do we offer to the Father? We can offer our married, single, or family life, work, outreach to others, and even relaxation along with our prayers and suffering to God. We can offer them anytime, but the best

time is at Mass, when we offer ourselves with Christ to the Father.

As prophet, Christ proclaimed the Good News of salvation. Like his Son, God calls us to evangelize others (both fellow Catholics and non-Catholics) by word and example. We witness most effectively when others see the difference Christ has made in our lives. The credibility of our witness lies in our ability to "get out of God's way" and to allow him to work in our lives.

Finally, as king, Christ became servant to all through his self-giving. Like Christ, God calls us to give of ourselves so the workplace and the home might become more humane. He calls us to serve in our parishes so they can grow and become more alive. He calls us integrate our Christian faith into our daily lives so our service might be His service to others.

So we make a difference as Christians when we offer ourselves to God, when we proclaim the Good News in word and example, and when we serve others. God calls us to worship, to witness, and to give.

Q: Who has inspired you to live as a Christian? What have they done to inspire you?

We followers of Christ become leaders when we try to answer one question. What difference has Christ made in our lives? But in a world of multiple voices and myriad distractions, getting the attention of our intended audience is difficult. How do we get that attention? The risk of example. To do something beyond the norm. Something that points to Christ. This is a hard, difficult road to travel for it entails doing the different, doing the unusual. It means putting our reputation on the line. But the reward is the glory of God. That is a goal worth the risk.

Q: What can you do today to be a good Christian example for others?