

5th Sun of Ord (Isa 58:5-10; Mt 5:13-16)

5 Feb 2023

Our gospel this week is a continuation of the Sermon on the Mount. In this segment, Jesus tells us that as his disciples, we are to be salt and we are to be light. Rather curious descriptors, don't you think? These images are meant to be reminders that we have been created not solely for ourselves but also, perhaps even more so, for the benefit of others.

Salt is an additive and a preservative. It's an ingredient meant to enhance the food it flavors. As salt, we are called to bring zest and meaning to our human existence, and we are called to improve the lives of the people we that we touch. And by acting like salt, we are given the responsibility to preserve our Christian morality and heritage. At the time of our baptisms, we were handed a lit candle signifying the Light of Christ. And with that candle, we were challenged to bring that light to others. As the sun is to our physical world, through our actions, we have the ability to bring the light of Christ to humanity in the form of kindness as well as material and emotional support. In doing so we offer hope for those struggling with the darkness of our world and we provide evidence of God's never ending love.

There are some in our society who view charitable compassion towards others as nothing more than a liberal political position. However, our Christian-Judeo history points to caring for and providing for the less fortunate as cornerstones of our Christian belief. Look no further than our first reading today. As the Israelites were returning from exile, many of them solely prioritized reestablishing their private farms and households as well as meeting their personal needs and desires. However, in addition to caring for themselves and rebuilding infrastructure, God, speaking through the prophet Isaiah, reminds them of the necessity to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless and clothe the naked. They are reminded of the need to be salt and light for others. In last week's gospel teaching

of the Beatitudes, God reminded us to live lives of humble selflessness. Additionally, in his parable of the judgment day, Jesus tells us that ultimately it is those who have provided for the least among their brothers who will be rewarded with life in the eternal Kingdom.

Catholics have been responding to the challenge of caring for the least among us by establishing and supporting institutions of salt and light for centuries. Just think about all the organizations founded on the principle of caring for those in need. Each and every Catholic based religious order puts the needs of others before their own. Furthermore, many of those religious communities have founded and staffed hospitals, orphanages and schools for generations. Within the laity, Catholic Charities and Catholic Relief Services and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul were all founded in response to the need to help the less fortunate. Similarly, the Knights of Columbus and Knights of Peter Claver were founded with the mission of charity and providing for widows through insurance. In fact, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) recognizes more than 100 national lay organizations devoted to being salt and light for those in need and the bishops remind us that the number of local charitable Catholic groups is beyond counting.

It's not hard to think of our society as part of a me-first world. Many of us haven't quite figured out that we'll probably never have everything we want but if we're honest, we most likely already have everything we need. Nonetheless, our pursuit and hoarding of stuff continues. Have you noticed all the self-storage units that keep springing up around town? The average 10 x10 storage unit in Indy costs about \$80/month. I wonder how many months it takes until the amount paid in rent exceeds the value of the things being stored. Seeing a business opportunity, I thought that maybe I should rent out storage space in my attic but then I remembered my attic is already full. Full of stuff like children's toys, and partial

dish sets, camping equipment and clothes that I'll never be able to wear again. Stuff that could surely serve a better purpose than collecting dust. Of course there is nothing wrong with having stuff so long as we also remember our Catholic duty to also be salt and light for our neighbors in need.

At the conclusion of Mass, after father's blessing, I typically use one of the following authorized dismissals: I either say "Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord," or "Go in peace, glorifying God by your life." How can we announce the Gospel and glorify God? One way is by being salt and light for our neighbors in need.