

## Homily of Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A 2023

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 in order 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."

In today's Gospel Acclamation from John 8:12, Jesus says about himself, "I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will have the light of life." 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. This is because we are supposed to be reflections of the glory of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). We are supposed to be fragrance of Christ (2 Corinthians 2:15). Christ is our head, and we are supposed to be his body (Colossians 1:18). We are supposed to be ambassadors of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Isaiah reminds us in the first reading 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 in need of 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 hope.

We will not be able to engage faithfully in works of mercy if we lack qualities of salt and light. And we have lost 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. Amen.

Isaiah, also, instructs us in the first reading, other important ways to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world: to remove from our midst oppression, false accusation, and malicious speech. These texts may be helpful for our reflection:

"Do not exploit the poor because they are poor and do not crush the needy in court, for the Lord will take their case and will exact life for life" (Proverbs 22:22-23).

"The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in those who tell the truth" (Proverbs 12:22).

"Those who guard their mouths preserve themselves; those who open wide their lips bring ruin" (Proverbs 13:3).

"Set a guard, Lord, before my mouth, keep watch over the door of my lips" (Psalm 141:3).

God's promises, in the first reading, to those who are the salt of the earth and the light of the world are: "Then 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.

Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer, you shall cry for help, and he will say: 'Here I am!' ... Then your light shall rise in the darkness, and your gloom shall become like midday" (Isaiah 58:8-10).

May I conclude by inviting us to pray for Nigeria, my country. There will be a presidential election in Nigeria on the 25<sup>th</sup> of this month. The dilapidation, insecurity, corruption, and persecution of Christians in Nigeria and the sufferings of Nigerians are constantly on the world news. The news items are only a tip of the iceberg of the precarious situation. In 2022, over 40 priests and religious were abducted for ransom. At least 39 priests were murdered in cold blood. These figures do not include leaders of other Christian denominations who suffered the same fate. Countless number of churches and church properties were burned down or destroyed. The number of Nigerians kidnapped for ransom or killed is unknown. Large sections of Nigeria are controlled by terrorists and armed gangs. **The Nigerian government is bogged down in corruption and incompetence.** Please, pray for God's special intervention in Nigeria. May God's Hosts repel all destabilizing forces against the election so that there will be a safe, peaceful, free, and fair election. May the voters make the right choice, and not put their lamp under a bushel basket, because, God helps those who help themselves. St. Augustine says, "God who created us without our help will not save us without our consent."

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