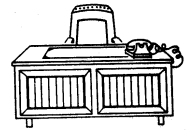


5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

February 5, 2023



From the Desk of
Fr. Romanus

Dear Parishioners,

In this Sunday's gospel, Jesus tells his disciples: "You are the salt of the earth" and "You are the light of the world." These are metaphors that describe the mission of discipleship. The two elements, salt and light, were integral parts of people's lives in Jesus' time and remain so today.

The primary purpose of salt is to make food palatable. There were other uses in ancient times, namely, as a preservative, to kill bacteria on wounds, etc. In the Middle Ages, salt was also used by victorious militaries to ensure that defeated territories remained barren. They would symbolically spread salt over a vanquished territory to ensure that it never becomes a threat again. This highlights a negative attribute of salt - the ability to destroy. Here in the Midwest, we spread salt on our roads in winter to make them drivable.

Jesus states that when salt fails in its primary function of providing flavor, it may not be suitable for other applications. It might as well be thrown out and trampled underfoot. Doctors often caution that excessive use of salt is detrimental to health. For us Christians, there is no such thing as too much salt. We ought not to be concerned about doing too much good.

The symbolism of light is equally compelling. Light is meant to illuminate and dispel darkness. There is no use for light that is covered up and prevented from giving out light. Without light, one ends up with darkness. For that reason, darkness is often described as a privation, that is, the absence of light. Light remains burning or illuminating as long as the energy source is there. When the energy source is used up, the light goes out. That is true of wax for candlelight, kerosene for lamps, propane for stoves, batteries for flashlights, vehicle lights and so on. Pope Francis says that the battery a Christian uses to generate light is prayer. When we are true to our calling, this energy source never dries up.

Furthermore, salt and light are discernible by sense perception. We taste salt and we see light. Neither is meant to be the direct or main object of perception. They help other things realize their potentials. Salt does not give flavor to itself, nor does light illuminate itself. No one makes salt for dinner. Salt gives seasoning to otherwise bland food. Same goes for light. We do not turn on light to look at light, but rather to look at other things by means of the light.

If a Christian is the light of the world, he/she is enabling the world to see something other than himself/herself. Likewise, if a Christian is salt of the earth, he/she makes something else (God) appeal to the taste of earthly people. We help people savor the goodness of God when they are truly the salt of the earth.

The first reading from Isaiah highlights some of those qualities that make us salt and light. We are told, "Share your bread with the hungry, shelter the oppressed and the homeless, clothe the naked when you see them, and do not turn your back on your own." It goes on to say that when we do these things, God's blessings are not too far behind. "Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your wounds shall quickly be healed...Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer, you shall cry for help, and he will say: Here I am."

There are fundamental qualities that identify us as Christians-loving, caring, prayerfulness, holiness, etc.

Any Christian who jettisons these qualities is no more useful than salt that has lost its flavor or light that is covered up. Retaining our qualities as salt and light entails that we are functioning in accordance with our calling as disciples of Christ.

Have a great week!

Fr. Romanus