

First Sunday of Ordinary Time, Sunday, February 8, 2026

I think I shared before that the opportunity to do my theological studies in Rome for five years was one of the greatest experiences of my life. A huge difference for me! Being so close to St. Peter's Basilica and the Pope right there and seeing him just about every Sunday if I wanted. I loved being close to all these great historic science, beautiful churches and all the rest. I think I've also shared that there came a time when all of that became sort of normal. You know, I can walk across St. Peter's Square without even turning my head to look at the Basilica. I'm not proud of that. But that's how it was. I think it illustrates a tragic flaw, not only in me, but in our human makeup the things that should always astound us, do not always astound us. After repeated exposure to these things sometimes we lose sight of how great they truly are.

And of course, this is not just true for landmarks, historical landmarks, but also for spiritual truths. We say things like, "We are children of God." We say, "God loves us." We say, "Jesus calls us his friends, brothers and sisters." We say things like, "The body and blood of Jesus Christ are truly present at the altar and given to us in Holy Communion." And I wonder how often we really allow the full weight of these words to rest on us. What if we started each day with thirty seconds just pondering the reality: "I am the son of God; I am a daughter of God?" I think the day would be way different.

Sometimes these beautiful, sublime truths of our faith become just commonplace, mundane. I think the same can be said of Jesus' words in today's Gospel. "*You are the light of the world.*" Hear Jesus saying those words to you: "*You are the light of the world.*" No, we're not the sun, this big light shining on the globe of the earth. But you are the light of the world. That's shocking. Astounding. And yet we

bandy these words about. They're just sort of ordinary things when they are the most extraordinary things. Extraordinary truths.

There was a letter written in the 2nd century, a letter to Dionetus. A very famous line from that letter says: *“What the soul is to the body, Christians are to the world.”* What the soul is to the body, Christians are to the world. You are the light of the world. You are the salt of the earth. Being a disciple of Jesus is not a hobby like so many others. For example, this person loves to play checkers; this person loves to ride horses; this person loves to play football or watch football; this person makes a mean spaghetti sauce; this person is the disciple Jesus. I don't know, it's not on par with all of those things. *“You are the light of the world.”* *You are the light of the world and the salt of the earth.* So, it would do us some good, I think, even just to ponder, and let ourselves get accustomed to these truths and not lose sight of their grandeur if you bring them to prayer and ponder them, and let the whole weight of these truths really sink in.

That's not what Jesus is talking about in today's Gospel! He's not saying, “My words to you are salt and light. So don't let them - don't let the salt of my words become insipid. Don't lose track of how this brilliance of these words that shine.” He is not saying that - even though those things are true. We want to recover that sense of wonder. He's saying, *“You are this salt of the earth. You have the potential to lose your taste and just stop being effective in the world.”* He's saying, *“You are the light of the world. Don't hide that light if there's a possibility that you could.”* You are the salt of the earth. You are meant to bring flavor and light to the human existence in this world. As the soul is to the body, so you are to the world. The body, without a soul, is absolutely mindless. You cannot do anything. The world without Christians? Life is dark.

You are light. Now, you may say Father in another place Jesus says, *"I am the light of the world."* And you are right. He's not saying you are light in yourself. He's saying, "You have my life in you. And you can shine with that light out into the world. You can let truth be known in the world. You can give guidance to the force of human events. You can bring the light of love and mercy into this world that so sorely and desperately needs that love."

Is the Church in the world light? Are Christians the light of this world? Is the presence of Christians throughout the world bringing the light, bringing flavor by salt? Does the presence of Christians around the enhance human life? Well, maybe that is little bit too broad. Let's talk about it here, in our town, in our place. Are we the light? Are we the salt?

Pope St. John Paul II in one of his addresses to families said, *"Families! Be what you are."* Well, there's an interesting exhortation. *"Be what you are."* Be, in practice, what you are in reality - your identity as a family, but also as Christians, as men and women, children, young people. "Be" in the practice of your life who God has made you to be. Be the light in practice that He has made you in your identity. Be transparent so that the light of Christ that dwells already in you shines forth like the dawn.

As we get to the end of today's Gospel, we see that's what it's all about. It's all about the glory of God. Jesus says, *"... your light must shine before others that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father."* It's all about giving you God the glory. That's how Christians are light in the world - they shine with the glory of God. The first reading gives us good instruction about how this plays out. *"Giving bread to the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless, clothing the naked, and don't turn your back on your own."*

Then your light shall shine forth like the dawn ... Remove from your midst of oppression, false accusation, malicious speech, ... satisfying the afflicted.” All of these things, all these things, if we do them from our heart, from the love of God, for the glory of God, our light shines forth.

We can do all of those things without the love of God. Right? You could give some money to the beggar on the street to ease your conscience. You can help your neighbor with a task so that you look good. I know. You can do those things because the love of Christ fills your being. And when you do that, God is light and this divine light shines forward. That is what Jesus is talking about. You are the light of the world. The light of the world is in you, and to shine down.

So, it's a good opportunity for us today to take stock of our own living the Christian life, to make an examination of our own conscience in this regard. Are we salt losing its taste? God, give us the grace not to lose that taste. Renew us in saltiness in the best meaning. Are we a light sometimes hidden under a bushel basket? God, give us the light to shine. Give us the grace to shine forth not to fight it. Let us radiate your goodness and the deeds that we do for love of you and our neighbor.

I conclude with a quotation from my Father Simeon, my favorite commentator, on the Gospel of St. Matthew. He warns us against just looking for the effects of our shining of the light or being the salt. He says: *“It would be a great mistake for us to look to avidly for proofs of the effect of our presence in the world. Inevitably, we would lose heart because in the end we lack the means of measuring and judging things as God sees them. Who knows the true meaning and import of what transpires in a human heart- our own or another's? How can we know whether a negative sign, such*

as sadness and conflict, is not in fact the middle phase of a process that will culminate in much good? Our real business is to allow God to shed his light through us and since the light belongs to him, he will know where to focus it and to what effect. Our endeavor should be to make ourselves transparent so as to not eclipse his brilliance.”

Lord, you made us salt and light. Help us to be what we are.