

REFLECTIONS FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME ~ 05 February 2023
The Mount ~ The Residence at Litledale

Tasting and seeing – these two precious senses are gifts from God, gifts we use to relate to our God (“Taste and see that the Lord is good” – Ps 34:8) and gifts we use to relate to one another (as we learn from Jesus’ parables in today’s reading from the Gospel of Matthew).

You are the salt of the Earth (Matt 5:13) – with these words, Jesus does not tell us to endeavour to be or seek to be the salt of the Earth. Jesus tells us that ***we are the salt of the Earth***. In ancient times as today, salt was highly valued – it was used for seasoning food, as a preservative (for meat, fish and olives), as an essential element in making cheese, as a disinfectant, in curing leather and glazing ceramics, in creating medicines, and in temple offerings. It comes from the Earth, refined from the interaction of water and the sun.



In the book of Numbers, we read about “a covenant of salt for ever before the Lord for you and your descendants” (Num 18:19). In the letter to the Colossians (4:6), we are told, “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.” Veronica Lawson rsm tells us, “To be salt of the earth is to season the earth community, to intensify its beauty, to be wise in one’s judgments, to be just and compassionate in all of one’s dealings.” In a simple prayer-poem, Steve Garnaas-Holmes echoes Veronica Lawson’s words:

You don’t aspire to saltiness.
It is who you are.
It’s the taste of being an element of earth
and an element of God.
Your saltiness is your faithfulness
to who God is in you.
The You of who you are
gives salt to this world.
It’s a quality that remains
even as it goes out into the stew of life
and adds to its savoriness.
Be true to your salt.
It will bring out the goodness in others.

You are the light of the world (Matt 5:14) – in his second parable in the text, Jesus speaks to being a city built on a hill and to being a lamp on a lampstand in the house, from the glow of a large city to the glow of a single household. In the book of Genesis, we are told that light is the first of God’s creations, “God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good” (Gen 1:3-4). The



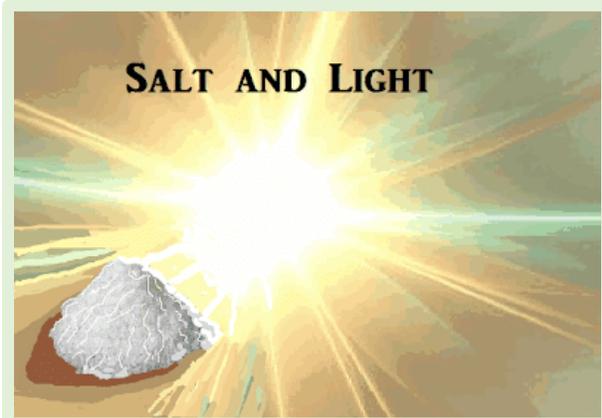
book of Isaiah is filled with images of light shown as God's way of restoring the people to new life:" O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord! (Is 2:5); "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined" (Is 9:2); "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you" (Is 60:1). In the first chapter of the Gospel of John, we are told about Jesus, "What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (Jn 1:4-5). Jesus says of himself, "I am the light of the world" (Jn 8:12).



But we are also told in the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, that we are called to be light for the world. In today's reading from Isaiah, the Lord tells us that if we do certain things, "Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly" (Is 58:8) and "your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday" (Is 58:10). And in this parable from Matthew, Jesus goes even further and says that **we are the light of the world**. Again, in another prayer-poem from Steve Garnaas-Holmes, we see this privilege God gives us of being lights for the world:

Every act of justice,
every act of compassion or mercy
is a light, a star in the night of this world.
You may think your efforts small and meaningless.
You may think they make no difference.
But go out and look up at the stars.
Which one should not have reached out in love?
Which one should never have bothered
to act in courage and compassion?
They all shine until they are swept up
in the great light of the One who dawns among us.
None of them rids the night of its darkness.
Yet God walks out and looks at them all and smiles.

Salt and light – to be salt and light is to be transformed into our truest selves, to be fully the ones whom God has called us to be. Pope Francis reminds us, "It's curious: both salt and light are for others, not for oneself. Salt does not give flavor to itself; light does not illuminate itself." Our first reading today from Isaiah tells us explicitly what being salt and light means – loosing the bonds of injustice, undoing the thongs of the yoke, letting the oppressed go free, breaking every yoke, sharing your bread with the hungry, bringing the homeless poor into your house; covering the naked, not hiding from your own kin, removing the yoke from among you, satisfying the need of the afflicted. Psalm 112 repeats the same themes: being gracious,



merciful, and righteous, dealing generously, lending conducting affairs with justice, distributing freely and giving to those who are poor.

In the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul gives us even more comfort when he reminds us that we can do all of this, we can be the salt and light that God expects us to be, even when we are in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. It is then that we have confidence that our faith rests “not on human wisdom but on the power of God” (1 Cor 2:5).

And so, we conclude with yet another prayer-poem that echoes this truth, this time taken from the writings of Roddy Hamilton:

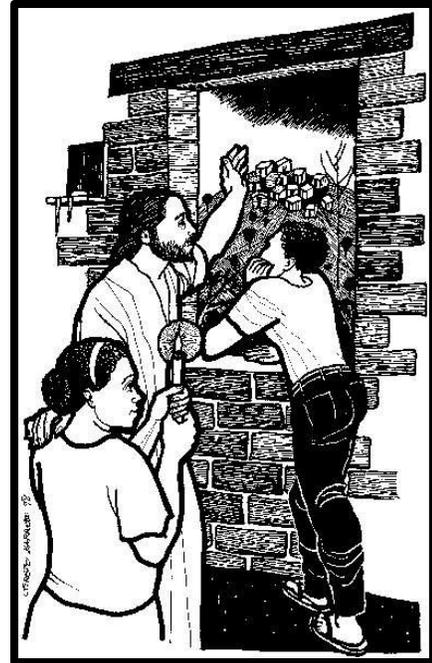
In a world that is always asking us
to become something, someone,
some success story,
In this place we say: don't become,
be who we already are.

Don't become light –
be the light you already are –
this is what God anciently placed in you.

Don't become salt –
be the salt you already are –
it is in this way you are known to God.

For from these elements:
Salt and Light,
God uniquely crafted you.

Don't become anything –
be who you are,
and discover the one who loves you in your be-ing.



Salt and Light, Cerezo Barredo

This week I encourage you to choose one of these elements – salt or light – and reflect on all the ways in which you are salt of the Earth or light of the world every single day. Remember, “Don't become light – be the light you already are. . . Don't become salt – be the salt you already are. . . Don't become anything – be who you are, and discover the one who loves you in your be-ing.”

