

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD**  
**in**  
**THE CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY**  
**Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**February 5, 2023**

**Lectionary Readings:**

Isaiah 58:7-10	Showing compassion is like a light shining in the dark.
1 Corinthians 2:1-5	God's wisdom does not rest on human intelligence.
Matthew 5:13-16	Salt and light do not exist for their own sake.

**Matthew:**

Jesus speaks with direct and present power: “You **are** salt ...You **are** light.” It is not a question of becoming or striving to become! He did not say, “You will be if you live long enough, or if you try hard enough, or if you do so many ritual things.” You are, in your present relationship to the Lord, a light for those in darkness, a flavoring and preserving presence among the people of the world.

We need to remember the context: The Sermon on the Mount, the new Law, a new covenant relationship with God. Immediately after the beatitudes (“God blesses those who ....”) is this statement of who you are before God and before people: You are the sign of God’s love and mercy in the world. Look at what God has done in your life! Let the world see what kind of God there is in the universe, a God who does the things that have been done in you!

Salt and Light are earthly representations of God. They refer to the Covenant between God and people: Ezekiel 43:24; Leviticus 2:13; Numbers 18:19; 2 Chronicles 13:5; Isaiah 60:1; Micah 7:8; Isaiah 42:6; 49:6; 60:3. Israel, too, comes to be seen as *salt* and *light* among the Gentiles. Now, in the new order of things, persons who are transformed in Christ have themselves become the images of God in the world.

Matthew writes from the perspective of a time when Christ has been raised from death, when his disciples have been transfigured themselves in the light of the Holy Spirit, when the Christian community begins to be noticed in a world of collapsed Jewish structures and of rampant immorality among the pagans. Christians are becoming aware, as perhaps never before, that they can make a difference in the world in which they live. They have been given a sublime role: to make Christ present by the radiance of their lives.

*Salt that loses its flavor:* The image here is difficult for us who have never seen salt in its natural state, exposed to the elements, sometimes contaminated by foreign substances, useless and even harmful, destructive of life rather than preservative of it. In ancient times, salt came primarily from the evaporation of heavily mineralized lakes or other stagnant bodies of water. At times, noxious substances predominated along with the salt. Such salt served no useful purpose. Even good salt could become contaminated and corrupted in storage. It had to be discarded. Disciples, too, can become contaminated by evil desires and sinful attitudes. When we absorb values that are contrary to those of Jesus Christ and of his Gospel, we have become less than useful to the kingdom of God. We may even have become enemies of the kingdom, destructive of its goals and its purposes. *Bad disciples* are like bad salt, not just failing to give good flavor to the works of salvation, not just failing to give a preservative grace to the life of the Church, but actively working for its destruction. Woe to such disciples! Surely they need to be removed from the environment of the community, *thrown out to be trampled upon by the world.*

Matthew shows a genuine concern for the well-being of the Church community for which he is writing. He is aware of unworthy and unfaithful disciples, some who have become contaminated by heretical teachings and by destructive behaviors. He had to find in the words of Jesus a teaching that would warn the community against these internal disorders and threats to the Church's integrity and mission. He reached for this powerful image and articulates it powerfully right after the beatitudes.

### **Isaiah:**

In the fuller context of today's reading, Isaiah speaks of the true fasting that does not seek to manipulate God but that seeks to imitate the God of the Covenant who gave of his very self, presence and love, for the sake of his people. In humility, the people are to do what God has done: to set captives free, to provide food for those who have none, and to provide shelter for the homeless. Had not God provided a homeland for his people and even brought them back to it after their Exile in Babylon? Those who do the works of God will be like a light in the darkness, just as the Lord went ahead of his people as a pillar of fire in the desert.

### **Corinthians:**

Paul does not need to use oratorical devices to persuade the people of Corinth of the truth of his teachings. The word that comes to him from God has its own internal power to transform the lives of those who receive it. That is the power of the very God who utters the word. Paul's own physical limitations do not stand in the way of the word's fulfillment. God provides the fulfillment.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. List and discuss the positive values and virtues that Christians bring to the Church and to the world for the good of both. How is the Church made better by the spiritual gifts that its holy members bring to it? How is the world enriched and enlightened by the holiness and virtues of holy Christians?
2. List and discuss the sins and vices that corrupt disciples bring to the Church and to the world in which they live. What is the negative impact of those who are unfaithful to their vocations among the laity and among the clergy?
3. Discuss the strategies that the faith community uses to guard itself and its mission from the evils of false disciples. Is it useful to separate and isolate evil?

## **PRAYER** **(Catholic)**

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| <b>1<sup>st</sup></b> | <b>I am the Lord your God;</b>                     |
|                       | <b>You shall not have other gods before me.</b>    |
| <b>2<sup>nd</sup></b> | <b>You shall not take the Lord's name in vain.</b> |
| <b>3<sup>rd</sup></b> | <b>Remember to keep holy the Sabbath Day.</b>      |
| <b>4<sup>th</sup></b> | <b>Honor your father and your mother.</b>          |
| <b>5<sup>th</sup></b> | <b>You shall not kill.</b>                         |
| <b>6<sup>th</sup></b> | <b>You shall not commit adultery.</b>              |
| <b>7<sup>th</sup></b> | <b>You shall not steal.</b>                        |

- 8<sup>th</sup>      You shall not bear false witness.**  
**9<sup>th</sup>      You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.**  
**10<sup>th</sup>     Nor shall you covet your neighbor's goods.**

## **CATHOLIC DOCTRINE**

Catholics used to be the only Christians around. Since the Protestant Reformation in the western world, we live side by side with other Christians who have developed their own traditions concerning religious matters. One of the differences between Catholics and Protestants lies in the numbering of the “Ten Commandments.” What we call the “Eighth Commandment” is numbered as the “Ninth” by some Protestants in the Reform tradition.

The commandment that prohibits false speech is quite straightforward: “Neither shall you bear false witness against your neighbor.” The original context of the law seems to have been in trials or legal proceedings. Perjury, sworn or unsworn, was an offense to God as guardian of the Covenant and of all relationships within the community. Lying came to be seen as a threat to all human communications. Falsification of truth leads to the erosion of trust among persons.

The Catholic tradition concerning the evil of falsehood is grounded in the assumption that falsehood originated with the Serpent in the Garden of Eden; lying flies in the face of loyalty to God. Those who lie can be said to be joining the Serpent in subverting God’s holy will for the human race. Then, of course, false witness is an offense against the One who is Truth, Jesus Christ the Lord. Finally, the Catholic tradition appeals to natural law which sees false testimony as contradictory to the natural purposes of human speech. Speech was made for truth; falsehood violates the very nature of human communication.

To lie to another human being is to violate the dignity of the human person: the one speaking and the one to whom one speaks. Human dignity requires that persons have a right to be told the truth in any utterance. (No one claims that every person has the right to be told everything, but everyone has the right to expect that whatever be told is true.)

Trade secrets, professional confidentiality, and the sacredness of the confessional all require that certain truths not be told. But whatever is told cannot be false, even on the pretext of protecting the rights of another. Silence does not speak louder than words when the only alternative to silence would be to tell a lie. Silence may well be the only legitimate option when the alternative would be to falsify the truth.

We may number the commandments of God differently, but we do not differ from Protestant Christians on the sacredness of truth among human beings.

(See *The Catechism*: #2464-2470; 2475-2487)

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