February 9, 2020
Is 58:7-10; 1 Cor 2:1-5; Mt 5:13-16

How “salty” are you? What kind of “flavor” do you add to the situations you find yourself in? Jesus tells us today that we are meant to be the “salt of the Earth,” and the “light of the world” - so the questions we each can ask ourselves is “how brightly do I reflect the light of Christ” and “how salty am I”?

Jesus’ use of the image of salt is very significant. Today we have so much salt available to us that we would never think that we can’t get some. But it was not this way in Jesus’ time. Salt was a very special commodity. Salt was useful - it was an essential preservative in desert areas in a time when there was no refrigeration, it is a essential nutrient (in areas of the world where it is hot and you are perspiring a lot you can become weak and ill for not having salt), and, of course, it is an important flavoring. Another aspect of salt that people would have seen at that time was its value. To get salt in ancient times (especially in inland areas) you couldn’t just go to the grocery store and get some. Traders from ocean areas, and owners of salt mines would sell salt at the markets like people purchased other vital food products. It was so valuable at one point that the Roman army paid their soldiers with salt - it was as valuable as money. Finally the people would have seen the way salt works. Salt all by itself can be harsh to eat, but combined with the flavors of food, it mixes with and enhances these flavors - it makes more tasty whatever it came into contact with.

Jesus is telling us to be the salt of the Earth - to enhance the world with the flavor of the Gospel, to improve the taste of whatever part of the world we come in contact with. He tells us to spread his valuable message as the valuable salt spreads through the whole pot of soup; to be instruments of his love in the world carrying that “flavor” like salt carries flavor into food. Salt that does not have flavor is no good to him. If we enter situations in the world - but do not add the flavor of Jesus Christ to that situation or group - then we are like salt that has no taste. What is the point of salt that gives no taste to what it’s added to?

What is this flavor that we are to spread into the world? How do we enhance the flavor of the world? One way is to spread the words of the Gospel, to give witness to Christ, to not be afraid to mention your faith - even in a world that increasingly tells you that there is some kind of rule against bringing your faith into the public arena. There is no such rule - in fact, we have
protected religious liberties in our country. Yet, even when these are absent, the Apostles and other early disciples give example by speaking boldly despite the opposition. Some of us will have very important opportunities to witness to Jesus, others will have more subtle ways that they speak about the Gospel. But you may say - “I’m really not that good at speaking” Now, this may just be an excuse from the person who has no problem spouting off about lots of other topics - but it is true that some people are really the quiet type in general, and may wonder what is Jesus saying to them. In many other places, Jesus speaks about showing his love to others - in practical ways, for example when he says that when you feed the hungry, cloth the naked, visit the prisoner, you do it for him - sometimes actions can speak many words.

In our second reading Paul - who was preaching openly - admits that his words were not as effective as the actions that he did (actions through which Jesus worked his power): *When I came to you, brothers and sisters, proclaiming the mystery of God, I did not come with sublimity of words or of wisdom ... my message and my proclamation were not with persuasive words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of Spirit and power.* We have been given a light from Christ - symbolized by the lighted candle that was given o each of us at our Baptism. Our salty “flavoring” of the world is also a spreading of the light of Christ to the world. Jesus tells us today that just like lights were not meant to lit and then just put under a basket, so our light does not make sense unless it is shining. He says: *Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.*

Our Good deeds are not just to support a good social program, not just to be a good citizen, not just to “pay it forward,” not just to do the right thing - these are all secular concepts. Jesus says that spreading of his message, and practical caring for others has another purpose - to draw others of God. Good words and good deeds that do not lead back to God are only half the story. God must be part of the transaction or it is only half-done. We heard in the first reading: *Share your bread with the hungry, shelter the oppressed and the homeless; clothe the naked when you see them ... Then your light shall break forth like the dawn ... Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer ... and the gloom shall become for you like midday.* We are called to let our light shine forth so that it leads others to God, we care called be pour words and deeds like flavorful salt to bring the light of Christ to situations - while at the same time being instruments of his love to help others. This is the flavoring and lighting of the world that Jesus calls us to. So we have to ask ourselves: “Do I spread light and flavor”? - “just how salty am I”? 