

If you were a taste, what would you be? Would you be sweet and appealing, like my lovely wife? Perhaps you'd be a hint of garlic, a hot pepper or some kind of curry. While you're pondering that, ask how others might characterize you. Would they say you're on the sour side, pretty vanilla, a tad bitter perhaps or maybe, like me, a variant of tutti-frutti? Would you leave an aftertaste? Please don't dismiss this as a silly exercise: Jesus didn't.

In addition to having some fun among yourselves with that today, I'd invite you to spend a few minutes just by yourself, ruminating seriously about what kind of taste you'd be and what that observation might suggest. To help you with that, let's take a look at what scientists tell us about taste, and what Jesus has to say.

Scientists tell us that creatures like you and me experience taste so that we can eat things that are good for us and reject those that might be poisonous. The human tongue contains receptors that can tell us what's sweet, sour, bitter, salty and savory. Since Jesus called our attention to saltiness in the gospel let's take a closer look at it.

Any idea what this is? (*hold up salt lick*) It's a salt lick. It turns out that animals really like salt and can't seem to get enough of it. Farmers and ranchers know this, so they use salt licks to provide sodium, magnesium, other minerals and sometimes medicines to their herds.

People have known for millennia that without salt, animals soon lose the ability to stand up, produce milk and bear offspring successfully. Deprived entirely of salt, animals quickly die. If that sounds similar to the crucial importance the love of God and the life of grace have to us, you're seeing the connection Jesus knew his followers back then would make.

We humans get all the salt our bodies need in our normal diet, which is why we won't be passing the salt lick around during mass today. You'll be getting what your spirit needs too when you receive communion a few minutes from now. We all know that as long as we eat

well, other things being equal, we stay healthy. Same goes for our life in the spirit. When we engage our faith, remain aware of God and live according to the law of love, we stay healthy, otherwise our souls wilt the same way our bodies would without salt.

There's more to it though. Not all animals have people to take care of them. Plant-eating animals in the wild, having the same need but no farmer to help them, wander about licking and tasting things until they find naturally occurring salt licks. Folks in Jesus' time certainly knew both the domestic and the wild side of what Jesus was talking about, and what he was really telling them using the image of salt.

In our time, people wander about the world in search of what they need to give life to their spirit. Jesus says you and I are light to the world and the salt of the earth. What he means is that those wandering people need to be able to find God in and through you and me. The salt of faith God gives us that keeps us spiritually alive needs to be shared with those who are wandering about looking for it. Jesus asks each of us to be tasty invitations to those around us, offering seekers, as the psalmist put it, to walk with us for a bit so they can "Taste and see the goodness of the Lord."

As you know, salt makes a person thirsty. Experiencing the salt of faith we share with them hopefully will make other folks, like us too, thirsty for God. As the psalmist puts it "Oh God, you are my God, for you I long. For you my soul is thirsting like a dry, weary land without water."

Sharing our salt's not a one-time deal, either. When my salt lick here dissolves, or gets too dirty, animals won't bother with it anymore. Likewise, when our relationship with God becomes tasteless not only do we lose interest, but others will notice that the salt's not there anymore and move on to see if they can find it someplace else. They might end up tasting something not good for them and get poisoned in the process, so it's important to remain tasty.

Jesus tells us people will know the quality of our salt by the way we taste - by the way we make people feel when they're around us. The poet Maya Angelou put it this way: "...people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."<sup>1</sup> People will never forget the way we taste to them, for it seems the aftertaste lingers.

Think about your answer to the opening question again. If you had to define the taste of your relationship with God, what would it be? Is it a taste you enjoy, or is it something else these days? Would anyone else be attracted to your taste? Would they agree with the author of Psalm 34 that they tasted what you offered and saw that the Lord is good? If not, what might you need to do to spice it up?

Whether you're happy enough with your answer or not let me suggest an exercise in practical Christianity for you. Try a new recipe this week – something you normally might not eat but which sounds pretty good. At the same time, try reading something new after dinner that adds salt to your life of faith – maybe some of Bishop Fulton Sheen or Thomas Merton, Scott Hahn or Fr. Richard Rohr, Patrick Madrid or Fr. Thomas Keating. You'll likely find that the two experiences – cooking something new and reading something new - reinforce each other.

If you're feeling adventurous, invite a friend or two or to over to share what you've cooked up, and what you're reading. We are, after all, meant to be light to the world, like Jesus. As your enjoyment of life and your enjoyment of your relationship with God both deepen you may find people eagerly asking to have more of what you're having. It might even seem as if they can't get enough of it. It is, after all, the way faith and good recipes are spread, and it's always in good taste.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/m/mayaangelo392897.html>