

## **Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time A - *Be the salt of the earth and light of the world, the keys to the Kingdom***

February 5, 2023.

The Church dedicates the month of February to the Holy Family. Let's pray, not just in February, but every day to ask the Holy Family's intercession for our families. ***"Jesus, Mary and Joseph, in you we contemplate the splendour of true love; to you we turn with trust. Holy Family of Nazareth, grant that our families too may be places of communion and prayer, authentic schools of the Gospel and small domestic churches. Holy Family of Nazareth, may families never again experience violence, rejection and division; may all who have been hurt or scandalized find ready comfort and healing. Holy Family of Nazareth, make us once more mindful of the sacredness and inviolability of the family, and its beauty in God's plan. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, graciously hear our prayer. Amen."***

This Sunday's Gospel reading is the continuation of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:13-16): ***"You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, .... You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."*** Last December, my friend Deacon John Wu in Calgary sent me an email recommending a 1944 movie starring Gregory Peck. It's about a Scottish priest. (<https://youtu.be/sl1txARbi1w>) Orphaned as a child, Francis Chisholm (Gregory Peck) grew up to join the priesthood. He was sent to China to establish a Catholic parish among the non-Christian Chinese in a parish with a burned out church. While his boyhood friend, also a priest, flourished in a more Christian area of the world, Father Chisholm struggled. He encountered hostility, isolation, disease, poverty and a variety of set backs which humbled him. Undaunted, he pressed on, but didn't initially fare well with the locals. It's not until the child of a Mandarin fell ill that Chisholm proved his worth. Over the span of many years he gained more acceptance and a growing congregation among the Chinese, through his quiet determination, understanding and patience. Over time, he collaborated with a trio of nuns, endured several wars. More years passed. Francis reached retirement age and two young priests came to replace him. On his final day before going back to Scotland, the townspeople lined the street as Francis drove through in an open top car. Father Chisholm is a successful disciple of Jesus. He is the ***"The salt of the earth and light of the world, the keys to the Kingdom"***

Many years ago I was officiating a funeral for a family who lost their parents. Their dad died first. Six months later their mom died. In the middle of their grief and pain, this family proclaimed their faith in Jesus Christ. They were convinced that their mom would join their dad in that place where there is no more pain, suffering or death. They were not saddened by the loss of their parent's lives but celebrated them because each brought so much love to the world. Instead of being pessimistic, this family was full of faith and life, love and light. We are the Light of the World.

We are also the Salt of the Earth. In these days of hockey season, many of us have stocked up on snacks for munching while watching games on TV. Now just about all the junk food needs salt. Popcorn, potato chips, french fries and many other snacks without salt would be rather tasteless. Think of what these foods are—mostly just greased up potatoes or corn. Salt tends to make ordinary things extraordinary. I read a story about a 13 year old who made the ordinary extraordinary and was salt on the earth. The boy was a super bicycle racer. He had been racing bicycles since he was 8. When he was not racing, he spent his spare time working on his bike, and building new bikes from scraps. By the time he was 12 he had three or four bicycles. His mother told him there were children at a nearby home for needy children who didn't have bikes; so one day he brought two of his bikes over there. He was deeply moved when he saw the expressions on the faces of the boys whom he gave the bikes to. He decided that he would make 18 more bikes for the rest of the children in the home. He

used all his allowance, did side jobs, and combed the city for discarded bicycle parts. That Christmas he delivered eighteen bicycles to the home. Well, the papers got hold of this and interviewed him. The boy responded. "It was no big deal. It was just something I could do to make other kids happy." His generosity, like salt, made ordinary things extraordinary.

This is why the closer we come to God, the more we desire to make a difference in the lives of our neighbours - our hearts burn with the same desires of Christ's heart. The saints are our examples. Our life is not just for ourselves. We are called to be a gift for others, a gift that leads them to God. This is the greatest thing about our life. We are called to give life. We are called to participate in the fruitfulness of God. We give life by enlightening others. We help other people come to the light by trying sincerely to go clearly towards the light and to show people the truth with no fear. The light shed by our lives produces a real effect on souls. Vatican II reminds us that modern man needs reasons for hope. A Christian carries hope. We need faith to carry hope.

St Elizabeth Ann Seton had a long and difficult journey into the Catholic faith. She lived around 1800 and was part of New York high society both by birth and also by marriage. As a young wife and mother, she felt a profound spiritual restlessness. As a non-Catholic Christian, she longed for a deeper relationship with Christ, but didn't know where to find it. A series of Crosses, including her husband's death, led her to the Catholic Church where she found what she was looking for in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Converting to Catholicism led her to be criticized and ostracized by friends, social circles, and even family members. But her deeper intimacy with Christ made the suffering worthwhile. Instead of falling into discouragement or self-pity, she found herself moved to start a new religious order dedicated to educating the young. Thus was born the Sisters of Charity, which now has five major divisions in the United States and Canada. And thus also began the American system of Catholic education, which now includes over 7,000 elementary and secondary schools throughout the United States. God wants to bring flavour and light to the world, and the closer we get to his Sacred Heart, the more our hearts will burn with that same desire.

Brothers and sisters, if God is calling each of us to make a real, everlasting difference in the lives of others, then it must be possible for us to do it. But how? This Sunday's First Reading (Isaiah 58:7-10) gives a starting list of possibilities: "**Share your bread with the hungry, shelter the oppressed and the homeless; clothe the naked when you see them, and do not turn your back on your own.**" Those correspond to some of the traditional corporal, or material, works of mercy. We can find another list of possibilities in the traditional spiritual works of mercy: comforting the sorrowful, instructing the ignorant, admonishing sinners, counselling the doubtful, praying for the living and the dead, bearing wrongs patiently, and forgiving injuries. Certainly, during Mass the Holy Spirit will translate these general ideas into some very practical possibilities in the heart of each one of us. But the Holy Spirit is extremely polite. He doesn't want us to be his slaves; he wants us to be his friends. And so, even though he will inspire good ideas, he will not force us to carry them out. He leaves us free to say yes or no. As we continue the sacred celebration of Christ's own sacrifice, of Christ's own perfect "yes" to the Father, let's say "yes" to him. Let's allow the beauty and the power of Mass to give us the courage we need this week to fulfill our life-mission just a little bit better than we did last week, being salt and light for a confused and broken world.

St. Theresa of Liseaux said we could all do little things with extraordinary love for God. We are called to be the salt of the earth. How can we do this? Well, we have to keep in contact with God. We have to pray daily as well as join the scriptural and sacramental worship of the community. We have to look for the little ways that we can be kind to others. The presence of a genuine Christ-like character enriches the community and enables the best in others to come forth. We can celebrate the presence of God at home and at work without going out of our way to do anything exceptional. The darkness in our world brought about by jealousy and hatred is dispelled when Christ is reflected by neighbours talking and acting in a friendly manner. Such acts of service create an environment where Christ can be known, loved and cherished. These and similar good works are the salt which gives flavour and

sparkle to the daily life and lets the light of Christ shine forth for all to see. We are the salt of the earth. We are the light of the world. We have been called to make the Lord present. Let's pray for the strength to live our faith. Amen.