

ORDINARY TIME FIFTH SUNDAY YEAR A 2011 HOMILY
(Isaiah 58: 7-10; 1 Corinthians 2: 1-5; Matthew 5: 13-16)

BE SALTY AND ON FIRE WITH CHRIST

- I know a lot about salt because about 18 years ago I was diagnosed with Meniere's disease which is an inner ear illness that affects hearing and balance and which can be controlled by a low sodium diet.
- We all need some sodium for our bodies to function (between 250 and 450 mg. a day)
- But average U.S. intake is 5-7 K mg.
- I can have about 1,000 mg. per day.
- I have adjusted, but life without salt can be very dull.
- I have found many substitutes for salt that make eating more interesting to me. I am always searching for substitutes and low sodium foods.
- My life is well-seasoned, I hope, just not with much salt.
- The Gospel today from Matthew is from the Sermon on the Mount. Last week, we heard the Beatitudes which form the very beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. This week we proclaim the next passage where Jesus tells us that we are salt and light.
- What does it mean to be salt and light as followers of Jesus?
- We disciples are to be to the earth what salt is to food – that is seasoning. This used to be beautifully symbolized in the old days when salt was mixed with the water of Baptism to remind the person receiving this first sacrament that he/she was called to be salt from the get-go.
- Our Christian lives make Jesus and his gospel interesting and attractive and tasty.
- We don't want to overdo it (as some do with the salt shaker). That is, we don't want to be overbearing in the practice of our faith or, as they say, be "more Catholic than the Pope" and scare people off unnecessarily because we have distorted the church's teachings.
- We are to be just the right "salt" so that we Christians lure each other to Christ and lure non-believers to him as well.
- Our lives should say: "Taste and see that the Lord is good" (as the song says).
- How do we do this?
- Through being authentic disciples: being prayerful first and foremost, being joyful, and being willing to follow the commandments strictly, and being willing to sacrifice our needs for the needs of family and community and the wider church and world.
- In the gospel today, Jesus also tells us that we are the light of the world.
- The 1st Reading (from Isaiah) gives us a guideline as to how to be this light and thus to attract others as light of the world and as salt for the earth.
- Is. says: take care of God's little ones-the hungry, the oppressed, the homeless. Clothe the naked, the prophet says, be good to family and friends and don't engage in false accusations or malicious speech.
- We might add other little ones that need our special attention in our day: the unborn and all children neglected or abused; the unemployed and the homeless; and those without health insurance. Our parish, along with other has recently begun to give 1½% of our offertory collection to a free medical clinic called "Helping Hands" which is located on Morse Road. We try to give part of our collections to charities and this has now become one of our causes. We also have parishioners who volunteer as physicians and nurses and in other ways at this clinic. Other parishes in our Northland Deanery are assisting this "Helping Hands" clinic as well. I think this is what Isaiah had in mind when he says in today's reading: "if you bestow your bread on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted, then light shall rise for you in the darkness and the gloom shall become for you like midday." Those without health care need our Christian compassion and this is another way that St. Paul's Parish dispels the darkness and the gloom of our world, as Isaiah says, and as Jesus calls us to do.
- Isaiah gives us the clue as to how to be salt and light and yeast for Jesus and his Gospel.
- As the early disciples were told: "This is how people will know we are Christians – by our love for one another."
- This is how we will be the seasoning, the spice-for the gospel.
- It is interesting that Jesus in our gospel does not say be salt and light; rather, he says you are salt and light. He is telling us that it is taken for granted that a Christian will be the seasoning and the fiery passion that the people of our communities and the world desperately need.

-When I was a boy, my uncle and aunt had a dairy farm and they had these big blocks of salt (salt licks) out in the fields so that the cows could get the salt they need. Every creature needs some salt to live and every soul needs some spice to live a godly life.

-I have learned, as a result of my Meniere's disease, just how much salt I need and how much salt I can have. May we all learn how salty and how much on fire with Christ we need to be in order to make the church and the world around us interesting and interested in Christ!

-May the Word of God help all of us at St. Paul's to know how to be salt of the earth and light of the world in our little corner of it!