

Homily
5th Sunday in Ordinary Time
February 5, 2023

Can you imagine life without salt? We often take salt for granted, except to hear how too much is bad for our health. Too much salt can lead to high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke. Too much salt can pull calcium from our bones causing osteoporosis. But the reality is that life couldn't exist without salt. We need the sodium from salt to conduct our nerve impulses. Our muscles need sodium to properly contract and relax. And life is so much better with salt. It reduces bitterness. It flavors our food. It brings out the other flavors of our food. And it has many other uses helpful to a fulfilling life. It gets red wine out of carpet and fabrics. It is a natural air freshener when added to orange peel. It disinfects minor wounds and soothes bee stings.

In the ancient world, especially during the time of Jesus, it was necessary as a preservative (they didn't have refrigerators). It was used for rites and rituals and as a convenient because salt makes things last longer. It was a sign of friendship and loyalty as it is long lasting and doesn't change. It sealed the deal as a bargain in the marketplace, again, because of salt's endurance and strength.

The only way for salt to lose these qualities is for it to be diluted or diminished. If salt is mixed with a liquid, it dissolves. If it is added to a powder, its effectiveness is minimized. Too much dilution and it loses its characteristics altogether. It is then very difficult to separate itself and become salt again; possible, but difficult.

Jesus tells us that we, "are the salt of the earth." We have the good characteristics of salt; we flavor our activities and our words, we preserve our goodness, we endure hardships and we help make things better. Isaiah said it well, "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."

What does that look like for us today? I don't often, if ever, see someone who is hungry and can't feed themselves for me to offer them food, or naked or homeless, but there are shelters that need supplies and volunteers, like the Mary Rose Mission. They need food, financial support and our time. St. Vincent de Paul offers assistance with rent and utilities, food and clothing, and household items. And they need our help with donations of supplies and money as well as our time. Catholic Charities is the 5th largest charity in the United States. They offer child and family services, counseling, housing and community outreach services. The local office for our diocese is located just a few miles south of the curia office. It serves "all people in our Diocese who lack basic human needs, including physical, spiritual, or emotional, regardless of their religious beliefs." And they need our support.

And what can we do ourselves? In addition to volunteering with or supporting one of these or many other remarkable charitable organizations, we can offer ourselves, in our time, talent and treasure. We start by recognizing and embracing God's first commandment, "Love the Lord my God with all my heart, and with all my soul, and with all my mind." And the second which is like it, "Love my neighbor as myself."

We hear this so often I fear it will lose its meaning. God created us because He loves us. And He tells us to do the same. And because of His perfect love for us, we have the choice to respond in kind; we choose to love or not, we choose to do and say good things or not, we choose to be salt for the earth or not. It's up to us. He also tells us that salt that loses its flavor isn't, "good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot." If we are diluted with worldly things that distract us from doing good, if we are focused on ourselves instead of those around us in need, we lose what makes us special, unique, in the image and likeness of God.

When we do and say good things, people will see and hear this. We become a good example to others. When we volunteer at the Mary Rose Mission, we don't do it to be seen, but we do it because it helps other. And in doing so, we are seen; we become a light that shines brightly. When we participate in charitable activities, we don't do it to show how great we are, we do it to help makes other people's lives better. And in doing so, we are seen; we become a light that rises in the darkness and removes the shadows of gloom.

The Responsorial Psalm tells us, "The just man is a light in darkness to the upright." We are in a good place when we do good. We aren't afraid of judgement when we aren't guilty of wrongdoing. When we work in the shadows, we are trying to avoid being seen for fear of being caught, knowing we are not doing good. These types of activities dilute our unique and special qualities; we become like salt that has lost its flavor.

The message today is to be the example of good, to be a reflection of God for all the world to see.

The reality is that we are mostly an example of good and we mostly reflect God. What about those times we do work in the darkness, those times we allow ourselves to be diluted, those times we hide what is special and unique and our salt loses its flavor. God give us a hand, if we will only take it. Jesus not only tells us what to do, but He gives us the tools to do it. He gives us instruction in His Word proclaimed. He strengthens us with His Body and Blood. He cures us with His loving mercy through the priest in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. He walks with us every step of the way. We can't do it on our own.

Knowing this, we can confidently be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. We just have to be humble enough to rely on God.