

2-5-17 ***To be salt and light:*** Having taught the disciples the beatitudes, Jesus now instructs them on how living the beatitudes has effects upon our world. He does so by using two metaphors – salt and light.

Like the ancient peoples when we think of salt, we first think of it as a preservative or enhancing the flavor of food. Unknown to the ancients, salt also contains an essential electrolyte that keeps our heart beating regularly. Unknown to most modern people, salt is especially useful for cooking in clay ovens. Even today, many people in the Middle-East prefer this method over gas or electric ovens. In Jesus day, instead of wood, people would gather camel or donkey dung, mix it with salt, and form them into patties. Then they would place a slab of salt at the base of the oven with the salted dung pattie on top. The catalytic properties of salt would burn for hours and then become useless. Perhaps this is what Jesus was referring to when he says that salt *“is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot.”*

In Judaism, salt was also used in sacrifices and covenant rituals. In fact, the Old Testament speaks of the “covenant of salt” which means a permanent relationship bound by loyalty. It was also used to drive away evil. So collectively, Jesus is teaching that to live as his disciples is to be bound in permanent loyalty to him, to be preserved in love and joy from within with every beat of our heart, to roll back the evil in our times, and – like those clay ovens with salt patties – to set-ablaze the world by the witness of the Gospel in our life. *“You are the salt of the earth,”* says Jesus.

You can see how Jesus is being very imaginative with these metaphors as he moves from salt to light. Jesus said of himself, *“I am the light of the world.”* Here he says, *“You are the light of the world.”* It is an inner light that becomes visible to others by our words, actions, what we say and do not say, what we do and do not do.

Again, Jesus is teaching that we are united to him. And by being bound to him we can shed the light of God’s love and wisdom amidst the darkness of ignorance and sin found in the world. It is not so much with doctrine or words but rather our good works which becomes our shining light. St. Francis de Sales says: *“Do not speak of God to those who do not ask. But live so that, sooner or later, they will ask.”*

I know this twenty-something guy who is really virtuous in living his Catholic faith. Most of the people he works with are in their 20’s, 30’s, and 40’s. They are all decent folks, easy-going, fun-loving, yet most are truly ignorant of God. They simply do not know any better. Many families in my generation and the next were never taught about God. And there are many who were raised in godly homes who have walked-away under the influence of our increasing relativistic and secular culture. The folks he worked with are content to live and work from one good time to another without much ambition beyond that. He would hang out with them after work or on days-off and have a few beers, dance, have fun and what-not. They all knew he went to Mass each weekend and found it kind of odd, but they liked him because he was hard-working, dependable, and never put any one down. They also knew he wouldn’t join them to smoke pot, or ingest Mollie, or use other drugs. They knew he wasn’t into one night stands or short-term relationships. One day one of the young ladies asked him, *“Why do you believe in heaven and hell.”* He responded, *“What do you love in life? I am sure you love your parents and family, right? I know you love to dance, have a good time, ski, rock-climb, kayak, and move from one adventure to another, right?”* She nodded in agreement. So he says, *“Hell is the absence of love. God is the source of all love. Not to have God in your life can be a living hell. This is why I believe in heaven and hell. I tasted a little of both.”* She thought for a moment and said *“Good answer”* and walked away.

“Do not speak of God to those who do not ask. But live so that, sooner or later, they will ask.” This guy will probably never see this gal again, but he certainly left an impression upon her and many others by neither imposing nor hiding his Christianity, by being true to Jesus, and by simply being himself. He is salt. He is light.

To live the beatitudes is to be the salt and light like Jesus Christ.