

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A
Fr. Chad S. Green
Mary, Queen of Peace Catholic Church
Sammamish, Washington
5 February 2023

Isaiah 58:7-10
Psalm 112
1 Corinthians 2:1-5
(John 8:12) Matthew 5:13-16

Salt of the Earth, Light of the World

In my homily last weekend, I referred to the movie we watched here at MQP on the fourth night of Marian Festival, called *Mary's Land*.¹ The movie is a documentary, but is played out as a pseudo-action/mystery/comedy, in which a “secret agent” is sent by his “boss” to investigate some curious people. If you didn’t get to see the movie—or would like to see it again—you can find a link to its website on our parish webpage. The movie’s storyline says this:

The Devil's Advocate receives a new mission: to fearlessly investigate those who still trust Heaven's formulas. [Those who speak with Jesus Christ, whom they call “Brother.” And with the Virgin Mary, whom they call “Mother.” And with God, whom they call “Father.”] Are they swindlers? Swindled? If he discovers that their beliefs are bogus, our lives will remain the same. But...what if they're not a fairy tale?²

The agent is sent around the world to interview *real* people: a corporate business executive and former member of the U.S. State Department, a model and actress, a street missionary, a doctor, a singer and dancer, and more. He is sent to investigate these people who—at least at one time—“had it all”: career, power, fame, status, money, popularity. Are they swindlers? Are they faking? Have they been swindled? Are they mentally ill or under the influence of a narcotic of some kind? Do they really talk to Jesus Christ as their “Brother”, Mary as their “Mother”, and God as their “Father”?

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Last weekend, we heard the beginning of the greatest and most well-known sermon the world has ever heard, known as Jesus’ *Sermon on the Mount*. Jesus has just begun His public

ministry in Galilee.³ He has just called His first disciples to follow Him.⁴ And great crowds, having seen His cures and heard His teachings, are beginning to follow Him, as well.⁵

Jesus has just begun and is already seeing quite a bit of success. One of the first things He does, after having such success, is preach this *Sermon*, which began with the portion we heard last Sunday: *The Beatitudes*. Blessed are: the poor in spirit, they who mourn, the meek, they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the clean of heart, the peacemakers, they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness. Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me.⁶

After hearing this list of things that don't typically sound like blessings to our ears, what made those disciples keep saying "yes" to following Jesus? Were they swindlers who were faking it? Were they swindled or tricked by Jesus? Or, did hearing these words touch something deep inside them, a stirring in their heart that convinced them this was the deepest truth. This was finally the answer to what they'd been looking for. Filling the hole in their heart that every human has until we say "yes" to God and allow Him to fill it?⁷

The Beatitudes—as well as the remainder of what Jesus preached in the *Sermon on the Mount*—turned the world that the disciples knew upside down and inside out. And it still does that for us today—if we take Jesus' words seriously.⁸ That's precisely the challenge for us as disciples. Can we take what we hear in the *Sermon on the Mount* seriously? Today's continuation of the *Sermon on the Mount*—as well as what we'll hear from Jesus in the next couple weeks—offers us another opportunity to reflect on Jesus' challenging—yet life-giving—words to us as His disciples.

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In today's Gospel, Jesus reminds us of both the gift, and the responsibility, we've been given. Through our Baptism—whether we've been Baptized, or are discerning or preparing for Baptism—we are made a new creation and given the gift of eternal life. We're given the Light of Jesus in our heart, and are called to keep it burning brightly. Those are the words that are spoken by the priest or deacon after someone is Baptized. After saying, "Receive the Light of Christ" and presenting the flame of the Paschal Candle, the priest or deacon continues, "this light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly."

Kept burning brightly for whom? On the one hand, it could be understood as a light we use to light our own way through the darkness of this world. Our own personal flashlight. Yet, Jesus clearly reveals in today's Gospel that the primary purpose of this gift of light that He gives to each disciple is for others. That's something we must be reminded of as disciples. All the gifts we receive in this world have been freely given to us by God. Freely given to us by God so that we may give them to others.

The light we've been given cannot be put under a bushel basket. It must be set out for the whole world to see.⁹ Through the ways we worship God. Through the ways we follow His Commandments. Through our good deeds.¹⁰ Through the ways that we practice and teach what Jesus practiced and taught. All for the purpose of offering and sharing that same gift with others: Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.¹¹ That's our primary purpose in this world as Jesus' disciples. As beloved sons and daughters of God. To make other disciples. To help all know they can receive the gift of faith and eternal life. That they, too, are beloved sons and daughters of God.

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A couple weeks ago, we began a new phase of strategic planning throughout the Archdiocese, called *Partners in the Gospel*.¹² The Archdiocese has an informative website about this initiative; there are Q&A / Overview / Timeline packets available on the tables in the Narthex; and we watched a video together at Mass, which you can watch on the Archdiocese website. All of this information is helpful for us to understand and be aware of: statistics about Mass attendance, number of Sacraments, building maintenance, number of priests and lay ministers, etc. These are all helpful statistics, but they aren't really the point of *Partners in the Gospel*.

Partners in the Gospel is all about what we heard in today's Gospel. That's really the only statistic that matters for us. It's difficult to measure, and it sometimes gets reduced to the other statistics that I just mentioned. But, I really encourage all of us to see beyond those statistics, and to look at the deeper "statistics" that truly matter.

How am I doing in my own "saltiness"? Am I helping Jesus as His "seasoning" in the world? How am I doing at shining my light in the world? How brightly is burning and being seen by all? These are questions we can reflect on both personally, as well as how we are doing at helping one another in these areas. This is not something we have to do alone.

This is what *Partners in the Gospel* is truly about. Helping each of us individually, and as parishes as a whole, to regain any flavor that might have been faded. To restore any light that may have dimmed. We don't yet know everything that will unfold in *Partners in the Gospel*. That, we pray, will be guided by the Holy Spirit and will be revealed in God's time. At this point, however, we are called to important work. To start laying the groundwork. To start tilling the soil of our hearts—through prayer and personal recommitment—so that we're ready to receive what the Lord has in store for us.

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Having heard these words from Jesus, you might feel motivated to restore or even increase your zeal or your light of faith. You might also be wondering how to do that? What does that mean for me personally to be “salt of the earth” and “light of the world”? This isn’t something you have to do on your own. One of the primary ways we restore, maintain, or increase our zeal and light is by gathering as the Body of Christ and staying close to the Sacraments and the Word of God. Lent is coming up, and it’s a good time to start thinking about what commitments I want to make in the three pillars: pray, fasting, almsgiving. Confession is offered three times a week at MQP (Friday and Saturday mornings, and Friday evening). We’ll have our Lenten Penance Service on Thursday, March 2nd, at 7:00 p.m. (with six priests, including those who speak Spanish). Staying close to the Eucharist: every Sunday, plus Wednesday evenings at 6:00 p.m. for our Lenten Candlelight Masses.

We also have another way that we’ve been working on preparing ourselves as disciples here at MQP, through a ministry called *The Evangelical Catholic*.¹³ In the Christmas Magazine, I wrote about it in my letter, in addition to parishioners who’ve been involved in it sharing their personal testimonies.¹⁴

Evangelical Catholic has been helping MQP form groups of parishioners 12-weeks at a time. These sessions help participants grow in holiness and discipleship with daily prayer and weekly meetings, while learning techniques for sharing the Gospel, and discerning how one might be called to do so in their own circumstances, settings, gifts, and vocation. If you’re interested in learning more, you can contact Chris Morgan or the Parish Office.

In the meantime, I’d like everyone to please mark their calendars for our two-night Lenten Parish Mission: Sunday, March 19th, and Monday, March 20th. We’ll have more details

to come, but this will be two evenings guided by a staff member from The Evangelical Catholic, leading us in learning, prayer, and discernment on the topic: “Your Mission in the World.”

I ask you—as a fellow disciple of Jesus Christ—to make this a priority in your schedule. To take seriously that Jesus Christ is still talking to us today. That Mother Mary is still talking to us today. They’re calling us and encouraging us to share our gifts with the world. The greatest gift we’ve been given after life itself is the gift of faith, because it leads to eternal life. We must share this priceless gift with others. We must be salt of the earth and light of the world. If we aren’t, then who will be?

¹ Juan Manuel Cotelo, *Mary’s Land* (<https://www.infinitomasuno.org/en/marys-land/>)

² *Mary’s Land* Storyline at IMDB (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3346766/>)

³ Matthew 4:12-17

⁴ Matthew 4:18-22

⁵ Matthew 4:23-25

⁶ Matthew 5:3-11

⁷ St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) in his *Confessions*: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”

⁸ Adrien Nocent, OSB, “Fourth Sunday: God Chooses the Poor” in *The Liturgical Year: Volume Three: Sundays Two to Thirty-Four in Ordinary Time* (tr. By Matthew J. O’Connell) (2013) p. 72:

“The gospel preaches a world turned inside out. This is not to say it claims poverty to be something good or that God’s blessing cannot be manifested in the gifts of material things. The gospel does, however, foresee that it is difficult to keep our hearts free in the midst of earthly possessions. That is the point of the beatitudes...

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Within the total context provided by the readings of the Sunday, the thematic beatitudes are poverty of spirit, meekness, mourning, hunger and thirst, and persecution—in short, everything that represents weakness, everything the world looks down its nose at and has trouble taking seriously.”

⁹ Matthew 5:14-16

¹⁰ Isaiah 58:7-10

¹¹ Matthew 28:19-20

¹² <https://archseattle.org/partners/>

¹³ <https://evangelicalcatholic.org/>

¹⁴ <https://customer-data-prod-bucket.s3.amazonaws.com/organization-uploads/0018000000Qx8MrAAJ/publications/1672772528679-REVISEDMaryQueenofPeaceSammamishWADecember252022reduced.pdf>