

Sunday Homily

Title Homily on Salt and Light

Date: February 8, 2026

Sunday: 5th Sunday of Ordinary Time (A cycle)

Scripture: Matthew 5: 13-16

By: Fr. Bob Schmitz

Text: What was Jesus thinking ABOUT US when he gave the Sermon on the Mount? Does he think we can be and do what he asks? Maybe it's my Catholic upbringing, but I have serious doubts about us. You might investigate this yourself. Read the Sermon on the Mount straight through in one sitting. It is Matthew chapters 5 through 7. Weigh yourself against the Lord's expectations. Chesterton's famous quote comes to mind: "The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and left untried." Difficult is an understatement. Does the Lord think we can do and be what he preaches? Does he think we can overcome years of being reminded of our failures to become something more? Let's look at the passage just read.

Brief words count. *You*, he says, "*You* are the salt of the earth"; *You* are the light of the world. Not the Pope—I like the Pope, but Jesus does not call him salt or light. When we use the word *church*, we often mean the bishops and clergy. Jesus does not call them salt or light. At the time of Jesus, our faith was already a thousand years old. But none of the great saints or writers of the past are called salt or light. He did not say any community, or parish, or nation is the light. Not even our worship and prayer are salt or light. He said, "*You*" are salt and light.

Let's investigate Scripture to see the importance of this designation. In Genesis chapter 1 verse 3, the first thing God creates is light. But the author of Genesis, a poet, did not record the creation of the sun or moon until verse 14. If the light is not the energy from the sun, then what is it? The author wrote the first Genesis creation story about the same time the prophet

Isaiah preached. Israel was under siege by the Assyrians; defeat and exile were on the horizon. But the prophet saw God's saving hand; "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light." The first light is salvation. Light and salvation come first because God intended to save us even before God thought to create humanity.

Let's jump ahead. St. John picked up on that very theme: "What came to be through him—through Christ—was life and this life was the light of the human race." John goes on: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." Light is salvation; light is the life Jesus gives us.

Back to today's Gospel. Jesus imagines a new humanity capable of participating in the salvation of the world, capable of being light of the world. The Beatitudes introduce a new personality type. The poor in spirit are those who give what they receive. Those who mourn are those who have empathy and are compassionate, people who respond to the suffering of others. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are those who strive for biblical justice, who see each person as a child of God with inherent rights and dignity. The peacemakers are those who create understanding, who overcome differences and divisions, rid us of hatred and prejudice. The Beatitudes call forth a new type of humanity who participate in the world's salvation.

I know this brief passage has a warning in it. Tasteless salt is useless. Someone can conceal light. We can fail. But let's leave that to Lent; Ash Wednesday is right around the corner. Today, let's consider just our potential and possibility. Jesus was not piling on, putting the weight of the world on our shoulders. He was not giving us another failure to confess. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus preaches that we should stop worrying so much. In a wonderful

passage, He tells us to watch colorful birds play or to enjoy flowers bloom. If God cares for the birds and flowers, how much more does God care for us, he asks. Jesus wants us to accept ourselves, to forgive ourselves, to dwell not on our weaknesses but on our capacity for the goodness God instilled in us. Part of the Lord's ministry on earth is to bring out of us what God put into us at creation and through our faith.

Here's how Jesus wants us to explore what God poured into us. Brief words count. Here, the preposition *in* makes all the difference. St. Paul says that baptism is living *in* the Spirit, *in* the newness of life. St. John tells us that when we receive the Lord's Body and Blood, we live *in* Him and He *in* us; and through Him, we live *in* the Father. Through baptism and Eucharist, we become a new humanity. The words of the Sermon on the Mount are evocative, they call forth the best that is ALREADY IN US. In one part of the Sermon, Jesus says: "So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect." Do you think Jesus went too far? I expect he would say, I didn't exaggerate. *You* are the light of the world.