

5th Sunday Ordinary Time Year "A"
February 9, 2014

The Spiritual Life—Keeping its Flavor.

Readings: Isaiah 58:7-10; 1 Cor. 2:1-5; Matthew 5:13-16

A little before my sixth birthday, we welcomed a new puppy to the family. I was so excited. When she used to lick my hand, I laughed uncontrollably, and took it as a sign of affection. Of course, my older brother was quick to remind me that the puppy was licking my hand, not because she liked me, but because of the salt. Not thinking that my palm was inordinately salty, I objected—“She would lick my hand even if I had a glove on!” But as I grew older, I was less offended by the suggestion. Salt is a very valuable and versatile seasoning, even in the spiritual life.

The ancient Romans had a pithy jingle about salt, one that loses its rhyme when translated from the original Latin. *Nil utilius sole et sale.* “There is nothing more useful than sun and salt.” Before the days of refrigeration, this was particularly the case. Plutarch, a 1st century Greek writer thought of meat as a deceased body, and it was the salt that would restore and preserve it, much akin to a new soul inserted into a lifeless body.

Still, we have little experience with salt losing its flavor in today’s modern age of re-sealable containers. The Dead Sea, however, was a glaring example to the ancients. If you took a gallon of water from the Dead Sea and allowed the water to evaporate, you would be left with well over a pound of utterly tasteless salt.

In the ancient world, salt served the function of preserving from corruption. Now perhaps it becomes more apparent why Jesus used this image when describing our role in the world. He used the image of salt to make some very good points about the nature of the Christian life. We can become an agent of preservation, a cleansing agent in a world often polluted with sin and despair.

There are times in our lives when the flame of spiritual life seems to flicker, or even go out. These are the times that we must persevere in our faith, lest the salt go flat. How can the salt keep its flavor if we begin to skip as many Sunday Masses as we attend? It just does not add up. Is it reasonable to expect much of a return for that kind of investment? Of course not! The Lord wants more from us.

Even for those who keep the basic precepts of the Church, we must guard against sterility in the faith, especially right now. February is a tough month. It rarely fails to happen this time of year. I refer to the gloom of a long, dark, and cold winter taking its effect upon even the heartiest of Minnesotans. In short, it is getting old.

A long, cold and snowy winter brings along with it Cabin fever, dirty and salty cars, itchy dry skin and all that goes with it. Isaiah reminds us that if we live virtuously, truly helping those in need, then the “light shall rise for you in the darkness, and the gloom shall become for you like midday.” There is hope in the midst of our darkness, be it physical or spiritual. Acknowledge that this is a challenging time and try to be more patient and understanding of others because we are all a little bit on edge!

And be optimistic—we have already gained nearly an hour and a half of daylight since Christmas. The worst is over, but there is no question that our spirits are tied in more often than we think to non-spiritual factors such as weather, work or school. In our second reading, St. Paul noted that we do not need to proclaim the Lord with any particular eloquence. Sometimes we just do not feel as fired up in our faith— God can work with that. Do not panic.

Our faith does not rest on human wisdom or affect, but on the power of God. The Lord will bring us through the cold and darkness into the warmth of His marvelous light.