

Fr. John's Homily for February 5, 2023, 5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

JMJ CHS

On behalf of Jesus, as one of his “chosen” representatives, I would remind all of you, that is, those of you who consider yourself true followers of Jesus, that YOU are *The Salt of the Earth*. Yes, just like those original Twelve.

I'm sure you have all heard this reading many times throughout your Catholic journey. And sometimes you hear the analogy of salt being used, not just as something to add flavor, but also, to preserve. So yes, we can also see ourselves as preservers – preservers of sanity in a crazy culture. And let's not forget that it has another important purpose. It also melts ice on your driveway during these Michigan winters.

But here Jesus is specifically talking about flavor. So we Catholic Christians add flavor to the world. We make it more palatable – we make it a better place to live in because a world without believers and without moral standards, and without good works, can be a pretty tasteless place to live. As we have seen.

But there is also an admonition associated with this passage. Don't lose your flavor because if you do, you are useless. For salt without flavor, there's no purpose other than to be thrown away and to be trampled under foot; or to spread on your driveway. So keep the faith. Persevere in doing good works, and in doing so you not only physically help others, but you are also giving a good example to our not-so-tasty world. Maybe they will give glory to God through you.... and the testimony of your life.

And for those who need an example of what we're talking about, we could offer a long list of how we've added flavor to our world. Where we often get accused of opposing science, and squashing knowledge, the opposite is actually true. The Catholic Church provided the world with the university system. And it continues to seek the truth through science and the other disciplines. And many Catholic scientists have distinguished themselves in the world. Take, for instance, Fr. George Lamaitre. He is the Priest/astro-physicist who proposed the *Big Bang Theory*. And giving one more plug here at the end of *Catholic Schools Week*, our Catholic parochial school system has certainly produced many distinguished citizens who have helped flavor our culture in difficult times. I would mention two from our own school. One will be making his debut as a multi-million dollar starting pitcher for the Texas Ranger this spring. And the other is a cinematographer, who recently made a movie called *Died Suddenly*, which is making a big splash on the Internet.

Also, consider the beauty of art and architecture. Beautiful ancient cathedrals and the art commissioned by the church or produced out of love by individual artists, all do add flavor to our dull world. And truth and beauty often has the effect of bringing seekers-of-truth into the Church.

And how about morality. The ancient Judeo-Christian tradition still attempts to exert positive moral influence on a world that has lost its way. And now, again, on behalf of Jesus, I proclaim to you that you are also *A City Set on a Hill*. You are like a beacon, a light tower casting out its light on a dark world.

We can understand this in both physical and spiritual terms. Holy Spirit Catholic Church is a physical building, on a small hill. A few feet higher in elevation than Winans Lake Road, it is one of the higher spots in this area. We are at 932 feet above sea level. And the highest point on our grounds here is our Bell Tower. The basic purpose of church bells is to call people to prayer. It announces Mass time but also provides a subtle invitation for anybody close by to come in and worship with us.

The bells also serve as a reminder to any of the faithful within earshot to stop what they're doing and pray certain prayers at specific times of the day. 6 AM, 12 noon, and 6 PM. It's the prayer called *The Angelus*. Every time I hear the bell, I try to stop what I'm doing. It's actually kind of hard. It requires a certain amount of discipline because it is an interruption in what I'm doing. I am sure you've seen that famous painting by French artist, Jean Francois Millet of the 2 peasant farmers out in the field. Hearing the bells from the church tower in the distance, they stop their planting and hoeing for a few moments, to pray....., *The Angelus*. And this tower over here. It doesn't look like much of a tower from in here, but it is outside. There are windows up top to bring light into us but wouldn't it be neat if we put lights up there to shine out into the neighborhood. I'm not sure it would go over that well with the neighbors, but the idea would be to serve as something like a lighthouse, and a beacon which can lead people to a "safe harbor". So in place of that, we simply light up the outside of our church, so that anybody who drives down Winans Lake Road can be reminded that this is a *House of God, and a Gate to Heaven*.

This idea of a *City on a Hill*, can also apply to us as a community, and to all of us as individuals. We are indeed called to be beacons, lighthouses of peace, truth, with joy emanating from us, illuminating the darkness. Our church is an active place. And I would like to think that we are hospitable and welcoming to anybody who passes through our doors. We are of service to many in our community through things like our *St. Vincent de Paul Society*. And we have a bookstore/gift shop that more and more people are learning about. And we do all kinds of interesting things around here that we hope are attractive to our many new neighbors. The challenge will always be to get the

message out and then to get them into our doors. We've tried hanging brochures on door knobs but it is kind of labor-intensive. Technology does provide us with more and more ways to share our message.

And something new. The folks at *Green Oak Township* have approached us to ask if our Church activity center could be used for a new polling place for election days. We are pondering that question, but it certainly does fit into the category of us being a city set on a hill and at least a potential beacon to those who come through our doors, perhaps to linger a while and ask a few questions. And I hope you're ready with some answers.

Next weekend we will have *The Chosen* dinner-and-a-movie bash and part of what our plan is, is to hand out these buttons. I had 200 made and we will provide them to anybody who would promise to wear them, and further, to be prepared to say something about them. And to assist the shy Catholic, we've also printed up several hundred of these business cards. One side shows a picture of Jesus, as played by Jonathan Roumie. Up in the corner it says *Come and See*. A line from the Gospels. On the other side, in only a few words, it describes the show and where it can be viewed. But it has that interesting technological tool called the *QR Code*. You simply hold up your smartphone camera to the code and you will be taken directly to a 3 minute trailer of *The Chosen* on *YouTube* which concludes with Dallas Jenkins telling us all about the show.

So we can play a part. We can be a beacon, we can be that candle on a lamp stand. By wearing a button and handing out cards and hopefully having an engaging conversation with someone who might need a word of encouragement.

If you've been watching the episodes, you see very often that there are testimonials of brave people who have recorded themselves with their own cell phones and sent it in to *The Chosen* website. And they speak about how God has been working with them, through the movie. They say they have been changed by the words, and through the characters and their portrayals. They are universally thankful and say that the show has been an inspiration and a means of healing and conversion in their lives.

I do believe that sharing our stories can be one of the ways that each of us can be a lamp, not burning under the bushel basket, but on the lamp-stand which lights the whole room. We each have our own stories. And we should not be shy about sharing with another what God has done for us.

~Fr. John