



February 5, 2023

Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time

"You are salt for the earth." Matthew 5:13



Dear Friends,

In Palestine at the time of Jesus (and even today) every village had adobe ovens. In the biblical period it was a common oven for the whole village. I'm sure these were places where people interacted, and news was shared. Wood was not plentiful, so the most common fuel was camel or donkey dung. The dung was collected, salt was mixed in, and then it was molded into cakes which were dried in the sun. A chunk of salt was placed on the oven floor and then a dung cake. Salt has catalytic properties which will cause the dung to ignite and burn.

Eventually, the chunk of salt loses its ability to ignite fire. Then it is thrown out on the ground where it can provide sure footing on the mud. Jesus uses this image of salt as a quality he desires in his disciples. *"You, my disciples, are salt for the earth-oven."* In Aramaic and Hebrew, the word for "earth" is the same word to refer to a "clay/adobe oven." Jesus is calling his disciples to set fires.

In our first reading, Isaiah wants his listeners to think critically about society. Do not just accept things as they are. What makes for a good and meaningful life? Discovering our gifts and using those gifts to better the world. This makes life meaningful. The message is not just to individuals but to communities. We are to ignite change.

Isaiah exhorts us to treat the needs of the vulnerable as our own needs: share our bread with the hungry, clothe the naked, and shelter those without a roof over their head. Isaiah tells us to build a new kind of community with better outcomes than the present. When we treat another's need as our own, we create a society that reflects the very glory of God. In such a society, no cry for help goes unanswered because the people of God live their vocation to reflect and make real the love of God. Our voices and efforts must serve the common good and remake the status quo. I see a lot of this kind of work in our Ecumenical Food Pantry and the St Vincent de Paul society in our community.

Jesus calls us to be salt and light. As salt we do not simply take note of others' needs. We ignite actions that prove that the needs of the vulnerable can be relieved. These actions shine like a light demonstrating the growing reality of the reign of God. On fire with the love of God, we can ignite the dung of this world. With our saltiness we can change something unpleasant into something that provides warmth, prepares nourishment, and illumines the ignorant. Let us ask ourselves, "where we have found real joy in our lives?" Chances are it is when we have given ourselves over in love to the needs of another. We know that love starts fires.

I want to conclude with a quote from St. Oscar Romero who used his voice and life to help end the violence that was tearing his country of El Salvador apart.

"There is a test to know if God is close to us, or far away: anyone who worries about the hungry, the naked, the poor, the missing, the tortured, the prisoners, or anyone suffering has God close to them. 'Cry out to the Lord, and he will hear you.' Religion is not just praying a lot. Religion is the promise of having God close to me because I have been good to my brothers and sisters. My prayers are not judged by the number of words in them, the quality of my prayers are very simple to judge by asking, 'How do I treat the poor' Because God is there." (Homily February 5, 1978)

Peace,

Fr Ron

Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: www.anne.church