



February 8, 2026

## Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time

*"You are the salt of the earth..." Matthew 5:13*

Dear Friends,

Not too long ago I quoted Cardinal Roger Mahoney who spoke out against ICE and the U.S. immigration policies. He said, "*Silence implies complicity.*" After mass someone told me in Ireland the saying is "*Silence breeds complicity.*" (The Irish understand this after centuries of English oppression). In other words, our silence only allows injustice to grow. The images to which Jesus calls his disciples is salt and light. Jesus does not invite passive resignation, but he wants us to ignite the fight for a more just society and world.

In the ancient middle east and even today clay-ovens were used to cook meals. In biblical times each village had a communal oven. Since villagers for the most part were members of a very large extended family, these common ovens were family ovens. Palestine is an arid climate and wood was not abundant. The fuel used was something a lot more abundant: camel or donkey dung. One of the duties of the girls was to collect the dung and mix salt in it and form it into patties to be left into the sun to dry.

A slab of salt was placed in the base of the oven. Then the salted patty was placed on it. Salt has a catalytic property which causes the salted dung patty to catch fire. Eventually the salt slab loses its catalytic properties and becomes useless. Or as Jesus says, "*It is good for nothing but to be thrown out.*" What Jesus is saying through this metaphor is "*You, my disciples, are the salt, that is the fire-starter for the earth/oven.*" In Aramaic and Hebrew, the word for the earth and for a clay-oven are the same.

To be salt is for the earth is to start fires and make things burn. If the disciples of Jesus do this, they will also be light for the world. Notice the images of salt and light are not individualistic. "*You are salt for the earth... You are the light of the world.*" We are not salt and light for ourselves. We serve a greater purpose. We are called to ignite a fire for a more just world. We are light that illuminates injustice and lights the way to healing and forgiveness.

Jesus and his culture are "salty" folk. They are prone to start fires of intense argumentation. Jesus is a master at it. He shows his catalytic qualities by frequently resorting to his talent for insulting people. For example, he uses the word "hypocrite" thirteen times in the Gospel of Matthew. Only Jesus uses this word mainly to insult his opponents the Pharisees. The Greek word *hypokrites* means actor. Jesus' use of the word shows that he views the Pharisees as nothing more than actors. They are not people that set the world on fire for the Kingdom.

Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel wrote in his book *Night*, "*I knew that I must bear witness.*" Elie knew he had to speak out. Our silence does breed complicity and normalizes terrible things. Catholics cannot be silent in the face of a culture of bullying, aggression, and threats of war that destabilizes prosperity and world peace. When outrage no longer feels adequate, we are tempted to fall silent. But our saying nothing is how violence and evil advance. Let us not be actors. We must be the salt and light that ignites a quest for a world not built on selfishness and greed, but a world built on communion, solidarity and love.

Peace,

*Fr Ron*

*Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: [www.anne.church](http://www.anne.church)*