

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time A (Feb. 5, 2023 STM: 5:15, 11:15)

John Ruskin lived in the days when English villages were lighted by lamps along the street. One evening, he watched with a friend as a lamplighter moved slowly on a distant hill, lighting the lamps along the street. Ruskin said, "There is what I mean by being a real Christian. You can trace his course by the lights that he leaves burning."

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus, I love that image . You can trace the course of a Christian by the lights he leaves burning. For that is our job, the job of a disciple. To keep the lights burning. Jesus uses the images of salt and light today. This teaching is part of the Sermon on the Mount and comes directly after Jesus' teaching of the Beatitudes last week. Now let's go back a bit further in the gospel. Before the Beatitudes in Matthew, we read about the people who were coming to Jesus *"They brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics and paralytics, and he cured them. And great crowds followed him ..."* So, the people to whom Jesus preached the Beatitudes were these folks-the excluded, the lame, the sick, the possessed. Jesus told them that they were blessed, that they were known to him, that the face of God was seen in them. And now, he is telling them that they are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Jesus uses the example of these folks to teach about blessedness and discipleship. He was saying that here are the people who bring flavor to the world. Here are the ones who illuminate. You do not need to be well or have it all put together to be my follower. You can be broken or sick or addicted, or whatever and still be my disciple. The Church is not a place for those who have it all put together. It is a place for those who need healing and hope. It is a place to learn discipleship.

With all this in mind, we can then begin to think about how each of us is called to flavor and light the world through our discipleship. And we do not need to be perfect people to do so. If that was the case we would not have a lot of people in church on Sunday. No, Jesus uses us as we are. There is a prayer I pray often. It begins *"Lord, use me as you find me in spite of myself..."* In spite of all that is us, Jesus can use us to light those lanterns along the way. He can use us even with all of our flaws and sins and warts. Whatever. God can use us to do great things.

Our job in this life of discipleship is to make a difference in some way. To be salt-to flavor the world. To be light-to confront the darkness that our world often presents. Remember salt preserves. It keeps things good. We should be known for preserving good in our culture. We should not cave into the evil of our day. Remember too that light scatters darkness. It dispels darkness.

One way we can practically live this call to be salt and light is by going back to the first reading for today from Isaiah for some advice.

*Share your bread with the hungry,
shelter the oppressed and the homeless;
clothe the naked when you see them,
and do not turn your back on your own.
Then your light shall break forth like the dawn...*

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This is what love looks like and when we reflect on all of the acts of mercy Isaiah describes, we can see how these good works — expressions of our love — can help drive away the ugliness, fear, and, yes, darkness that brings grief, despair, and death into the world.

Disciples flavor and enlighten. We leave that string of lighted lamps along the path of our life. I invite you think a bit about your path—the lamps put in your way. How can you light those lamps? We have endless opportunities here at STM to serve others: to serve the poor, to serve the parish. Folks do this through our financial assistance ministry, our furniture project, our Caring and Sharing Center. When our extraordinary ministers of communion visit the sick in their homes and hospitals, they leave a trail of lighted lamps. We have opportunities to flavor the world through the work of evangelization in our faith formation programs. Fr. Steven and I were able to spend time with the middle school youth last Sunday night. They had lots of questions for us. We were able to see the dedication of the catechists who freely give of their time to form our youth in the faith. A trail of lighted lamps. This past week was Catholic Schools week. I was able to see the energy and devotion of our faculty who each day go above and beyond to provide Catholic education to our students. A trail of lighted lamps.

This all is the work of discipleship, the work of salt and light in our world. People presenting themselves as they are for the good of the work of the Kingdom of God.

I want to end today with a prayer of St. Charles Foucauld. I think it captures well the spirit that each of us should have in trying to undertake the work of discipleship.

O Lord,
grant us faith,
the faith that removes the mask from the world
and manifests God in all things;
the faith that enables everything to be seen
in another light:
that shows us the greatness of God
and lets us see our own littleness;
that shows us Christ
where our eyes see only a poor person;
that shows us the Savior
where we feel only pain.
O Lord,
grant us the faith
that inspires us to undertake
everything that God wants

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without hesitation,
without shame,
without fear,
and without ever retreating;
that faith that fears
neither danger, nor sorrow, nor death;
the faith that knows how to go through life
with calm, peace, and profound joy,
and that makes the soul completely indifferent
to everything that is not you. Amen.

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