

St Pius & St Anthony Homily 5th Sunday Ordinary Time Year A1

Salt & Light! Jesus tells his disciples to be 'salt and light for others'-Salt of the Earth and Light of the World. But what does that mean?

To me, the elements salt and light are universally present but don't take them for granted as they are so valuable. Just ask any dish on the table that just a little salt (how do cooks say it today?) will make the vegetables 'Pop', salt helping to release its flavors, or ask any plant I try to grow how important light is? Salt and Light may seem common, but try getting by without them.

So maybe Jesus calling us Christians to be 'Salt & Light', is like telling us to live like those handy helpful substances that I bet every family grew up with: I am talking about those home remedies that we all grew up with – that secret oil that is called upon in all kinds of circumstances to make things better. Something wrong or hurt, go get some – it will help heal and get you over it. Maybe for some families it was the old Vicks Salve, or I heard the comedian Chris Rock go on and on one time about his family's quick-fix to any hurt – his dad pulled out the 'Robitussin' – for everything. It was his miracle tonic. – if you had a sore throat-a spoonful of 'Robitussin' would fix it. A cough/headache? Take 'Robitussin'. Chris said, "I wrecked my bike & scraped my knee, and dad said, 'Rub some Robitussin into it' (Answer to everything). In my family, if it wasn't a simple baby aspirin that would take care of everything, then it was – I don't even know if they make this stuff anymore (*I heard it was banned because of mercury content-Neosporin dominates now I think*) , but it was Merthiolate- I am here to testify that a little bit of it goes a long way, a little of it is felt all through your body! But it was our go-to; any cut or stab, if we got a splinter or stepped on glass, the Merthiolate treatment came our way. Oh, did it sting! We dreaded its application. But strangely afterward, we wore its sign like a merit badge of honor. Showing the red stain to friends, we could say, "Not only did I survive that injury, but I survived its treatment – look at this 'Merthiolate' Red! So, that little brown bottle was pulled out anytime our skin was broken. It was handily available and seemed to meet every need, and heal.

So, I suspect that Jesus calling us to be 'Salt & Light' is something like that. He is calling us to be readily available, ever-present to others and to address or meet every circumstance to bring healing or draw out the good from everything around us. It strikes me that both salt and light seem 'meant to be shared or scattered'. What I am suggesting is that salt and light both easily spread. Try

containing light, no letting it leak out even when you are trying to hide it, like ask kids who are reading 'e-tablets' at night and the light radiates out of their room to reveal that they didn't in fact go to sleep after all (in my day it was the flashlight under the covers reading comics), and since salt is granular just tipping the salt shaker over sends salt scattering everywhere (in every crevice of table wood or the leaves' joints). So Jesus wants Christians to be readily shared, scattered and distributed among all people. But we might ask to what effect or end does He want Christians to share? And that leads us to ask how 'light and salt' function in our lives, and what that indicates for how Christians are to live.

I call salt and light 'selfless substances'. What I mean by that is that both salt and light excel when added to other things ***to make the other things better.*** Salt and light both intend to draw attention away from themselves and on to someone else. What do we do with salt but add it to dishes and say, "It enhances the flavor, seasons it and brings out its natural flavors better." We don't shake salt into our hands and eat it as a snack itself. No, we add it to watermelon, or potatoes or meat to draw out better the inner flavor of those foods. So, Jesus is telling us to be like salt and draw the good out of other people better. Season the world, accent and enhance the good flavor already out there. With my favorite dish, Eggplant, I don't think of the kosher sea salt added, when enjoying it. no, only the vegetable itself, so Jesus wants us to bring out the good, the best in others without drawing attention to ourselves. And, doesn't light do the same type of selfless work: focusing attention on something other than itself. Imagine a flashlight -it always shines on others-not itself, how could we ever make our truck's headlamps shine back on themselves. No, light is always directed toward others, spotlighting or highlighting the good going on over there already. So light is selfless and other-centered. It's work is for pointing out the good in others.

And another aspect that both salt and light share is that they both have healing qualities! So Jesus wants Christians to be a 'healing presence in the world.' Traditionally, salt is seen as 'healing'. How often have we heard, maybe after we sprain our ankle, that we should soak it in an Epsom salt bath (or an infected ingrown toenail-soak it in a tub of Epsom salt solution). Salt for healing – Again, back when I was kid, when we complained of a sore throat, it meant go to the kitchen sink and gargle glass of hot salt water for soothing or healing!

And doesn't light heal us too? Just think of sufferers of Seasonal Affective Disorder, who suffer depression because of not enough sun-day light. Or as a kid, we were just lounging in the sun, mom might say, 'If you are just going to stay there, peel back that bandage and let the sun shine on you to heal up your wound.' Or especially in these past couple years going through COVID, we have learned more about the sanitizing/germ-killing capability of UV Light. I bet you've seen the light sterilizers for combs-scissors in barber shops or the UV Light Hand (Jet engine) Dryers in bathrooms now. So, light also brings healing.

So, what does all this reflection on salt and light mean? I find that Jesus is telling us to be a readily available, ever-present to others and a healing presence in the world, always ready to apply ourselves for good and to bring the best out of those around us. He wishes us to be 'selfless servants' like salt and light, keeping attention on others (*not ourselves-remember how ordinary 'light and salt' are*) and to enhance and season the world, drawing out the best from everyone around us.