

5th Sunday of Ordinary Time “To Be Salt”

Bishop Frank Schuster

My friends, in recent decades, salt has gotten a bad reputation because of the health concerns associated with too much salt in our diet. I mean, who doesn’t like French Fries? French Fries are basically a salad when it gets right down to it. My nutritionist disagrees. I am constantly encouraged to limit the amount of salt in my diet. Have any of you? However, salt is one of the basic tastes we have and a certain amount of it is important for health and even survival. Our culture just gets too much of it and so salt has become another four-letter word. However, if we take a moment and look historically at the importance of salt, Jesus’ invitation to be the salt of the earth will make more sense.

In ancient times, salt was considered an important preservative. They didn’t have refrigerators other than what they could manage with underground pantries so when we discovered how salt could extend the shelf life of food, creating edible salt became a very important and lucrative business. Over time, salt therefore became an important item for trade between countries and was even traded as a kind of currency. As a result, it is interesting how often you find the word salt in many of the common words we use. For instance, the word “salary”, believe it or not, comes from word for salt. Your pay would be reflected by how much salt you earned for the day. Did you know the name given for the city of “Saltsburg” literally means “salt city”? This is because of the importance of the salt industry throughout their history. Even the word “salad” comes from the word for salt in reference to the old practice of salting leafy vegetables. And so, maybe French Fries are a salad...just minus the leafy vegetables.

And so, when Jesus says, you are the salt of the earth, what he is inviting us to consider is, by becoming disciples that proclaim the Kingdom of God in word and deed, we become the preservative that keeps the world from spoiling. Get it? He is also saying that by proclaiming the Good News of the Gospel by the example of our lives, we will give the world in which we live in better taste. Just as food tastes better with salt, the world tastes better when people live the Gospel.

Our first reading from Isaiah does a good job at articulating what this can look like. He says, “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.” He continues, “Remove from your midst oppression, false accusation and malicious speech, if you bestow your bread on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted...then light shall rise for you in the darkness”.

This is why Jesus also invites us to consider, “You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. People shouldn’t light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket. The lamp should be placed on a lamp stand to give light to the whole house.” Jesus continues, “Your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.” I cannot help but draw attention to the Eucharistic implication here. If we believe Jesus is fully present in the Holy Communion we receive at Mass today, and if mom is

right when she says we are what we eat, then we are called as a Eucharistic people to become Christ to the world.

This Gospel couldn't be a better one for our confirmandi this morning. The Sacrament of Confirmation will strengthen and empower you to let your light shine in a world that can be dark. The Sacrament of the Confirmation will empower you to be that preservative, the Good News, that keeps the world from spoiling. The Sacrament of Confirmation will encourage you to be that spice that just makes everything taste better.

Brass tacks: What Jesus is saying to all of us today is that it is not enough to simply say we are disciples. Discipleship must look like something. Discipleship looks like a city shining on a hill. Discipleship looks like a lamp giving light to a household. Discipleship looks like that spice that give's life flavor. Discipleship looks like following Jesus, who alone is the way, the truth and the life.