

Proper 1

Sunday between 4 to 10 February, if earlier than the Second Sunday before Lent · Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Principal Service readings

Isaiah 58.1-9a [b-12]	Fasting that is acceptable to God
Psalms 112.1-9 [10]	Blessed is anyone who delights in God's law
1 Corinthians 2.1-12 [13-16]	The mysterious wisdom of God; receiving God's spirit
Matthew 5.13-20	God's people are salt and light; fulfilling the law

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Salt and light

Jesus went up the mountain and was joined by his disciples. Then he began to teach them: ¹³You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

¹⁴You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

The perfection of the law

¹⁷Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil. ¹⁸For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For I tell you, unless your righteousness

exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.’

Matthew 5.13-20 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

This is part of the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount and follows on from the Beatitudes. Though the disciples are mentioned as part of the audience (5.1), it seems that all the people are meant to take on the teaching.

The teaching begins with the phrase, ‘You are’, continuing the style of the Beatitudes. The sayings Matthew records about salt and light are found elsewhere in the synoptic gospels (Mark 9.49-50 and Luke 14.34-35 about salt, and Mark 4.21 and Luke 8.16 about light). The sayings define the identity of those who follow Jesus faithfully. Note that they also have a significance for the world as a whole: ‘salt of the earth’ (5.13) and ‘light of the world’ (5.14).

The final section establishes the connection between Jesus’ teaching and the Torah. There is no distinct parallel with any other synoptic text. Although there are tensions with apparent abrogations of the Torah (5.31, 33, 38) the overall thrust is that Jesus’ fulfillment affirms and establishes the Torah, rather than nullifying it. It is expressing the convictions of the Matthean community.

Quotations

1

Jesus himself, as the gospel story goes on to its dramatic conclusion, lives out the same message of the Sermon on the Mount: he is the light of the world, he is the salt of the earth, he loves his enemies and gives his life for them, he is lifted up on a hill so that the world can see.

N. T. Wright, 1948–

2

Continue to walk in the faith and, faithful to the mandate that has been entrusted to you, go out with solicitude and joy toward all creatures and

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pass on to them the gifts of salvation...Let yourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit to be the leaven of new life, salt of the earth and light of the world.

Pope Benedict XVI, 1927–

Related topics

For further study:

Discipleship; morality; mission of the church; kingdom of God; symbol of light; conversion; justice / social teaching of the church; evangelisation

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,
you have called your Church
to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.
Give us vigorous faith and a love that is genuine,
so that all may see our works
give you the glory.

We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

Opening prayers · Ordinary Time 5, Year A²

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² *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.*