

A Public Social Purpose Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time/A February 5, 2017
5:00 Vigil Mass **Is 58:7-10;** 1 Cor 2:1-5; **Mt 5:13-16** (Jesus' teachings need to be
clearly manifested in what we do and say, not hidden in private.)

“A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden.”

From Jesus' viewpoint, and it's important that we notice this if we are followers of his, **there is no such thing as private faith.** That's a very modern notion: faith is personal, faith is private, faith is subjective—not according to Christ. “A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. **You are the salt of the earth. You are light of the world.**” Faith is a public matter and must manifest itself in some public way. **It has a public social purpose.**

Salt is a preservative. People are complaining that it is in all the foods, but that's because it's a preservative. Before refrigeration it was one of the few ways to keep food from rot. If we are to be the salt of the earth, **we have to have some role in preserving the earth.** Consider Pope Francis' encyclical on nature.

Light, **light is essential to vision.** If we are the light of the world, that means **we are essential for the world to see the truth.** These are very important and even profound teachings. “A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden.” Our beliefs and our values rooted in **Jesus' teachings need to be clearly manifested in what we do and say,** not hidden in private. Building the kingdom of God requires the aid and support of people, although it's really God's work, but God does not want to do it all by himself; that is not God's plan. **God's plan is to involve us in his work.** Not only does God intend this, but **Jesus expresses faith, his faith, his trust that we will do it.**

Now we are very used to being encouraged to have faith in God and to trust in God. **Here God is saying he has faith in you.** He trusts you to do what needs to be done. **“You are the salt of the earth,” and I trust you will be salt. “You are the light of the world,” and I trust you will enlighten the world.** So those two points are, I think, very important for us to take home.

There is a third one from the first reading from Isaiah. **Isaiah is talking about the connection between the moral fabric of people and the condition of their society,** meaning that what we do for others improves our own well-being; what we fail to do for others causes our

own well-being to be lessened. As he puts it, **the basic measure of morality is the treatment of the least, the weakest, the poorest.** So he promises: “Share your bread, shelter the oppressed and the homeless; clothe the naked, then your light shall break forth and your wound shall quickly be healed.” The many wounds of that society and our society are due to the failure to care for the least, the weakest, and the poorest.

People naturally work for their own well-being and naturally fight for their own rights, as they should. However we have to acknowledge that **some people don't have the wherewithal to achieve any kind of rights for themselves, and they cannot prosper all by themselves** and, therefore, they cannot achieve any kind of decent living standard. This according to Isaiah is not only a problem for them; **it's a problem for all of us. Low wage-earners cannot afford housing.** Every Friday morning people who have slept downstairs in our parish center go off to work, and they work every day. Sometimes they have two jobs, but they cannot get together enough money for rent. This is a sadness. **PADs is good, but it's only a temporary solution to a very deep social cancer.** The market doesn't help much because building low-rent housing is not profitable, and markets are about profits, naturally. That is why there is hope because **the new administration is proposing a program to put people to work, and one of the possible goals is building affordable housing.** You are invited to add your voice to the deliberations by signing a postcard after Mass **urging our representative to support low-cost housing in the coming infrastructure bill.** You are also invited to join other parishioners on Thursdays in hosting the homeless downstairs in our temporary but necessary, as it were, Band-Aid on a very serious social ulcer as we are waiting for a more permanent solution.