

## FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR A)

February 9, 2020

Isaiah 58:7–10 • 1 Corinthians 2:1–5 • Matthew 5:13–16

### I.

On Friday morning I received a text message from a staff member at a former parish.

It was a picture of a long-time teacher at the parish school becoming a Catholic.

The message went like this:

“Father, she became Catholic on January 26.  
She wanted you to see this picture.”

After many years, that person became a Catholic.

A slight detour here.

Because this person was a baptized Christian,  
we do not say that she is a “convert.”

The term “convert” is strictly reserved to unbaptized persons  
who become Catholics.

For those who are baptized non-Catholics,  
we say that they are “received into the full communion of the Catholic Church.”

“Full communion,” because there is partial communion or unity among Christian  
denominations owing to Baptism, Scripture, the Creed, and so forth.

End of detour.

I’ve been thinking about how and why this person entered the Catholic Church.

For years—decades—she saw the Catholic faith expressed in the weekly Mass at  
the parish school.

She saw Catholic values lived out in the school:  
in the classroom, in service projects, and so forth.

And she saw the witness of Catholics:  
teachers and faculty at the school, along with other parishioners.

## II.

“You are the salt of the earth. ...  
You are the light of the world.”

Bearing witness to Jesus Christ is the fundamental task of every Christian.

That means personally living out the faith in all of its dimensions,  
and teaching others about it.

In that way, a baptized Christian points the way to the Son of God,  
who is present and active in the world.

Bearing witness to the Gospel is so much a part of Christian life that Jesus says  
that not doing would be nonsensical:

“You are the salt of the earth.  
But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned?  
It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out  
and trampled underfoot.”

It’s impossible for salt to lose its flavor;  
how can a Christian not give witness to his or her faith?

I think that Catholics are intimidated by the concept of evangelization,  
which means bearing witness to the Gospel.

Perhaps we think of it as proselytizing—forcibly converting people.

No, evangelization does not impose anything;  
it proposes that Jesus Christ is the reason for our lives,  
and that he brings each person’s life to fulfillment.

Evangelization involves words and deeds.

Deeds come first; words explain why we live the way we do.

Members of the clergy—bishops, priests, and deacons—  
have evangelization as their primary task.

So do you, the lay faithful.

The Second Vatican Council explained that there is a special apostolate or mission that lay men and women in regard to evangelization:

“The laity are called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can it become the salt of the earth. Thus every layman, in virtue of the very gifts bestowed upon him, is at the same time a witness and a living instrument of the mission of the Church” (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, no. 33).

Salt of the earth and light of the world.

Today’s Gospel is a kind of sequel to the Gospel we heard last Sunday on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, or Candlemas, with its theme and image of light.

Today’s Gospel is an encouragement to radiate that light:

“Nor do they light a lamp and place it under a bushel basket;  
it is set on a lampstand,  
where it gives light all in the house.  
Just so, your light must shine before others,  
that they may see your good deeds  
and glorify your heavenly Father.”

How is the light of Christ supposed to shine in our lives?

I think the basic movement is this:  
personal conversion leads to witness.

An encounter with Jesus Christ, and a firsthand experience of his love and mercy, cannot be contained—it naturally flows into witness.

Faith is not merely subjective; it’s not just for one person.

No, faith is a personal source of strength, to be sure; but it is much more than that.

It is the way of salvation.

It is the way for the world to be transformed according to Gospel values: beauty, truth, justice, reconciliation.

Here's I'm thinking of the Virginia March for Life that will take place on Thursday.

It's an opportunity to bear witness to the Good News that each person's life has dignity, including those still in their mother's womb, and that dignity must be protected.

Salt and light; conversion leads to witness.

Friday was the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Frank Parater, a native Richmonder and seminarian of the diocese.

As a child, he served daily Mass for the Visitation Sisters on Church Hill; as a teenager he attained the rank of Eagle Scout and he graduated as valedictorian from Benedictine High School.

Frank was sent to the seminary in Rome, where he unexpectedly died from rheumatic fever at the age of twenty-two.

After his death, a spiritual testament was discovered among his personal effects.

Frank Parater had written the following:

“I have offered everything I have—everything—  
for the conversion of the non-Catholics of Virginia.  
This is what I live for, and, should I die, what I die for. ...  
I shall be able to be of more use to my diocese in Heaven  
than I could ever be on earth.”

The cause for his canonization in 2001.

A young man who gave witness to his faith each day,  
salt of the earth and light of the world.