

## 5th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

### GOSPEL

Jerusalem Bible © 1966 by Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd and Doubleday & Company Inc.

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You are the salt of the earth. But if salt becomes tasteless, what can make it salty again? It is good for nothing, and can only be thrown out to be trampled underfoot by men.

'You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill-top cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp to put it under a tub; they put it on the lamp-stand where it shines for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine in the sight of men, so that, seeing your good works, they may give the praise to your Father in heaven.'

(Matthew 5:13-16)

### DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- In the ancient world, salt was absolutely essential. It was used not simply to season food or to add to its taste, but also as a preservative, enabling food to be stored and kept.
- At the time of Jesus, the main source of oil for lamps was the olive. A saucer-shaped lamp held the oil, and a wick, made of flax or a similar material, burned from a small opening on the rim. Such lamps were often placed in a niche in the walls of rooms.
- Lamp oil was a precious commodity. Once lit, a lamp was often placed high to give maximum illumination.
- Ancient cities were often built on hilltops so that they were easily defended against invaders and were visible for many miles around.

### EXPLORING THE WORD

To understand this text, it is important to place it alongside the Beatitudes that immediately precede it (you could read these together first). In that text, the virtues to be cultivated by followers of Jesus are outlined, but the danger with taking the Beatitudes on their own is that faith can become contented peacefulness and somewhat inward-looking. To avoid this risk, Matthew follows the Beatitudes with this text, which teaches disciples about the task of Christians in the world. They have been given the gifts; they are the salt of the earth. But if they just see their blessedness and rest there, they risk becoming 'tasteless' and good only to be 'trampled underfoot'. Instead, the disciples are urged to place their light high on a hill and let it shine for all to see. They are witnesses to God's living presence, not just for the nation of Israel but for all the world. In seeing the way that Christians live and act—their 'good works'—others will be drawn to God through their active witness to faith. Others will come to give praise to God in heaven. This is an amazing responsibility, and Jesus acknowledges that some salt may lose its taste and some lights be hidden. The challenge for Christians, new and old, is not to take the gift of faith for granted and let it become tasteless; not to keep the light confined to private moments but to allow others to see the difference faith makes so that they can know the presence and power of God.

- How is this a challenge to you?
- How can you let your faith shine forth?

### MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- What aspects of your journey so far have been a 'light' to you?
- For whom are you a light?
- In what circumstances does your light shine best?
- Reflect on what it is in your life that gives you zest and flavour, and that preserves you. What guides your behaviour and gives you strength to keep going? What is 'salt' to you? Share your reflections.
- Identify one talent that you have and use it well and often this week. Let your light shine.
- Use a candle this week each time you pray. Use an adaptation of the gospel acclamation:

*I am the light of the world, says the Lord;  
the one who follows me  
will have the light of life.  
Alleluia!*

