

**Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A  
(Feb. 6, 2011)**

***Put a Little Spice in Your Life!***

Salt and light! Jesus says we are salt and light. He doesn't say, "You should be salt and light." He says, "You are salt and light." So what does all that mean and how does it affect us today?

We are salt and light by the very fact that we follow Jesus. By our baptism and as members of this community that we call church, we are salt and light. Now what do salt and light do? Salt, of course, can make things tasty. Even more importantly it was used to preserve food. Salt changed what it touched, kept it from spoiling, rotting, corrupting. Salt even purified. That's why in Old Testament times they used salt to season every sacrifice. "With all your offerings," God told the people through Moses, "You shall offer salt." (Lev. 2:13)

And what about light? Well if you think of those one-room cottages in Jesus' time, those small dish-like lamps where they burned oil were essential. It wasn't a particularly bright light, hardly the three-way bulbs we put in our lamps today, but without it life would have been gloomy indeed. Inside the house I could not have seen you once the sun went down. Much of life would have stopped at dusk. So the light made life more pleasant, more enjoyable.

So what is Jesus asking us to do by calling us salt and light? It seems to me he is saying we should make our world a little tastier, perhaps add some spice to life. We should help enlighten the world around us. Bring light to darkness, help to dispel the gloom. Where there is sadness bring joy. In other words the world we live in should be a better, happier place because of us.

Isaiah the Prophet talks of light as well. He says in our first reading, "Your light shall break forth like the dawn and your wound shall quickly be healed." When will that happen? Through the prophet God says that will happen when we share our bread with the hungry, shelter the oppressed and the homeless; clothe the naked when we see them and not turn our backs on our own.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta was someone whose light broke forth like the dawn and who brought light into the lives of many people living in darkness and gloom.

But of course we can't all be Mother Teresa. However there is another person who brought light to many people, who helped make life better for them but who is not very well known.

Let me tell you about Bea Gaddy. Have you ever heard of her?

Bea Gaddy was a homeless woman in Baltimore. She lived on the streets. One year around Thanksgiving time she invested fifty cents in the lottery and lo and behold her number came up and she won \$70. What to do with this new-found wealth? Bea was not a selfish person so she decided to use her winnings to throw a Thanksgiving dinner for a few of her friends. The next year she managed to scrape together some more money, enough to invite a few more people to share Thanksgiving dinner with her. Well, this went on year after year and every year the party grew bigger. More and more people heard about Bea and what she was doing. Many people started contributing to the preparation of her Thanksgiving meal for the homeless, some with money, some with food, some with helping to prepare and serve the meal. I don't know exactly where this celebration is today, but the last time I heard about it, Bea with all her helpers had served 17,000 people on Thanksgiving Day. That was about ten years ago. Obviously she had a lot of help. She managed to have someone donate a huge tent that was raised in Patterson Park in East Baltimore and people kept coming all day long, either to help out or to share the meal. It's an extraordinary story.

I don't know how religious a person Bea was. But she obviously had the spirit that Isaiah was talking about in that first reading and that Jesus talks about when he tells us to feed the hungry.

Lent begins next month. It's a time to reflect upon ourselves and our response to God's call. The church asks us to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday and to abstain from meat on all Fridays until Easter. But it asks us to think also in terms of what we can do for others.

If we ever get discouraged thinking of all the awful things happening in our world these days, it might be encouraging to think of people like Bea Gaddy, like Mother Teresa, like Dorothy Day, like Horace McKenna. We might take some inspiration from people like them.

I think we could say they were not just light. They were the salt of the earth as well. With her Thanksgiving dinners Bea Gaddy certainly made things tastier for a lot of people.

How about us? How will we be salt and light?