

## **Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time/Catholic Schools Week**

### **Bishop Bradley's Reflections on the Sunday Readings**

February 4, 2017 4:30 p.m. St. Mary Parish, Niles

I am so pleased to be here with you to celebrate the closing of Catholic Schools Week. First of all, I want to give special recognition to all the current students of St. Mary Catholic School who are here at this Mass, along with their families. In addition, I want to recognize and thank in particular Mrs. Sharon Gregorski, School Principal, and all the teachers, volunteers and staff. We also thank the parents and grandparents and all those who sacrifice so much to send their children to this great school. It's wonderful that Father David Otto, the Pastor Emeritus of this wonderful parish is here with us and we thank him for his great support for the school over so many years, along with, of course, Deacon Roger Gregorski and your current pastor, Father Christian Johnston. Finally we recognize all of St. Mary Parish for understanding the importance of Catholic Schools as the best way to help pass on the Faith to the next generation, and we thank all the parishioners who sacrificially provide for, subsidize and give such strong support to the school and make it possible for the school to continue its very important mission.

Throughout this whole Catholic Schools Week, we have been celebrating our 23 Catholic Schools throughout the Diocese, and the close to more than 6,500 Catholic Schools throughout the United States. What makes all our Catholic Schools great is that wherever they are or no matter how big or small they might be, they not only provide an excellent education with consistently competitive test scores and high graduation percentages, but they also are the best ways our Church has to pass on the Catholic Faith to the next generation as we help them to come to know and love God.

It's built into the very mission of St. Mary's School which states: "The mission of St. Mary's School is to gather as a faith-filled community in union with parents to form students through the Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Catholic tradition and to provide an excellent education." And all of you are a part of that mission: from the pastor to all the parishioners who support it, to the parents whose primary responsibility it is to educate their child/children in the ways of Faith, to the principal/teachers/school board/and volunteers. St. Mary's School is an essential part of the life of St. Mary Parish, and a very important responsibility that St. Mary Parish, and every

Parish has, which is to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to share the Catholic faith with all the members of the Parish, active, inactive, and unchurched. So, that's why I'm so pleased to be here with you to celebrate this very important part of the mission of the whole Church.

The Scripture Readings we just heard for this Fifth Sunday of the Year are so appropriate, not only for those here who are directly celebrating Catholic Schools Week, but for every one of us here who are baptized in Christ. There was a "theme" that was pretty obvious as we listened to all the Readings ---- that "theme" is Light!

In the First Reading, we heard the Prophet Isaiah give very strong directions: "*Share your bread with the hungry; Shelter the oppressed and the homeless; Clothe the naked when you see them; Do not turn your back on your own.*"\_But what's interesting is that Isaiah teaches that there is a consequence for doing those acts of charity---for showing such compassion to those in need; he says: When you do all of that, "*THEN, your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your wound shall quickly be healed;....THEN you shall call, and the Lord will answer...and He will say: 'Here I am!'*"

The Psalm Response repeats that same theme with the beautiful words: "*The just man is a light in darkness to the upright!*", and each of the verses of that Psalm emphasize how good deeds and a virtuous life, e.g. "*those who are gracious, those who lend to others, those who lavishly give to the poor, and those who conduct their own affairs with justice----* they are as welcome to others as is Light shining in darkness.

And that's the theme that continues in today's Gospel as well. Remember last week, Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount by teaching the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the poor in spirit....the merciful....the meek....the pure of heart...." etc. with the conclusion being that the reward for living according to the Beatitudes will be "great in Heaven". So in today's Gospel, Jesus is continuing to teach that same Sermon on the Mount by telling His disciples---and all of us baptized into Jesus' life---that we need to be "*the salt of the earth*" and "*the light of the world*".

What's the purpose of salt? What's the purpose of light? Really neither one of them have a purpose in and of themselves, but their purpose is to enrich---to make better----others. No one sits down to a big bowl of salt, right? Salt adds taste in small quantities. If your potatoes don't have salt, they taste bland; but if there's too much salt, they become uneatable. We need a "pinch" of salt; a "dash" of salt---just the right amount of salt. If we don't use it to flavor our

food, it's good for nothing else, except perhaps to throw on our sidewalks and roadways when the snow comes.

It's the same with light. If there's no light, we can't see at all; if there's too much, we can be blinded; so we need just the right amount of light to carry on our other important functions. \_As Jesus says so clearly: no one would light a lamp and put it under a bushel basket; no, you put it on the lampstand so that everyone in the house can see clearly.

That's what Jesus tells all of us this afternoon----Be the salt of the earth; Let your Light shine before others. Just like Isaiah told us, Jesus says there will be consequences. As He said, *"Just so, our light must shine before others SO THAT they may see your good deeds, AND THEN, give glory to your heavenly Father."*

So, Light and Good Deeds are connected.

Of course, that means more than just being able to physically "see" the good deeds that are being done. What Isaiah and Jesus both mean is that when we do good deeds---when we help those in need, or when we perform any of what we have come to know as the Corporal Works of Mercy, such as---feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, freeing the oppressed, welcome the stranger; or the Spiritual Works of Mercy----such as forgiving offences, comforting the afflicted, counseling the doubtful and instructing those who need to be educated (such as what St. Mary's School and St. Mary's CCD Program does)-----when we "see" that the reason why we are doing those good deeds is because the people we are helping are children of God and brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ-----THEN other people will be inspired perhaps to do likewise, and our Heavenly Father can be glorified.

We do good deeds not to get brownie points with God, and we do good deeds not because we hope that God might love us any more (which of course is impossible since God loves each of us unconditionally already). No, we do Good Deeds because it's the right thing to do----it's what Jesus is teaching us in His Sermon on the Mount is the way to become blessed/holy/and ultimately, it's the way to have our reward be great in Heaven.

We are called to be Salt of the Earth and the Light of the World, not only because the earth needs to taste better or the world needs to be less dark (though that is very true); we are called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world through the good deeds that we do, including supporting our Parish Catholic Schools and our Parish Religious Education Programs, because

we are bringing God's Love and Light to those in need, and in doing so, each of us will truly  
"glorify your heavenly Father."

God bless you, now and always!