

Today Jesus commands us to live as salt of the earth,

And light of the world.

The African American poet, *Maya Angelou*,

Endured *terrible* hardship and abuse in her early life –

People treating her with unspeakable *cruelty* –

While *others* turned their back on that cruelty with cold *indifference*.

Yet there were individuals who *were* like a *light* to *lift* her out of *darkness*.

She has said:

*"I've learned that people will forget what you **said**,*

people will forget what you did,

*but people will **never** forget how you made them **feel**."*

I encourage you and myself to *contemplate*:

Who has been a *light* in my life?

Especially when times seemed *dark*?

When my heart was *heavy* –

And they helped me *carry* that load?

Or when I could not *see* what way to *go* on my life's journey –

And they *showed* me the way?

And as for *salt* –

Who has added flavor to my life?

A little *joy* and *love* and *connection* –

Preserving my body *and* my spirit – from the *decay*?

And then,

Also consider:

How can *I* bring a little bit of light to scatter the darkness?

How can I *shine*?

Not for *myself* –

But so that those on the *fringes* of life's darkness –

May see the very light of *God*?

We *are* called to be like a shining city on the hill for *all* to see.

The *synod* sessions we've been having are *all* about drawing others *into* the *light*.

Lent is *fast* approaching.

And *one* thing we can consider as a penitential act –

The simple act of directing our hearts' attention on *God's* merciful light –

Is to practice any of the *corporal works of mercy*.

Does anyone *remember* them from Catholic school?

Or from the example of their *parents*?

Many of these were named in *Isaiah* as *ways* to be a light to our little corner of the world.

Jesus repeats them in Matthew 25 –

And He says –

*“Whatever you did for one of these **least** brothers of mine, you did for **me.**”*

This is how we will be judged as belonging to the light or to the darkness.

These *corporal* works can be summed up by the saying:

*“The way to a man’s *heart* is through his *stomach.*”*

In *other* words, when we care for the good of one’s *physical* needs –

It *opens* the way to caring for their *spiritual* needs.

Just like I couldn’t teach a young child’s *mind*,

When he came to class *sleep* deprived or *hungry*.

Consider these works of mercy,

And *which* ones are *we* able to do –

Especially when there’s no glory in it for *ourselves* –

Yet it let’s the glory of *God’s* love to break open upon the world:

First: Feed the Hungry

Second: Shelter the homeless

Third: Visit the imprisoned

Fourth: Bury the dead

Lastly: Give alms to the poor.

In *applying* these works, I hearken back to that first reading from Isaiah where he says:

*If you **remove** from your midst*

Oppression, false accusation, and malicious speech –

While performing these merciful acts,

Then light shall rise for you in the darkness,

And the gloom shall become for you like midday.

My friends,

We live in a world *that seems* connected by modern electronic technology –

Such that the *world* is at our fingertips.

But for every *speck* of light out there,

There is a *sea* of darkness.

Media *prey* on our fears.

And they *spur* divisions –

Like degenerates amused to *use* human beings

Like opponents in a *cockfight*.

May we *recoil* from hateful speech, and from casting *accusation* upon others,

Who seem to *disagree* with us.

May we work to find what draws us *together* –

To put *aside* our wounded egos –

To cast a light on the *common* goodness and common *needs* of the human person.

How can opposing sides come *together* –

Not to curse the darkness only to heap dark upon *dark* –

But to light a *candle*?

To take *care* of our own –

And *with* our own – to serve those on the outer *fringes* of our shining city.

Such that real people – the *least* among us –

Are *not* turned into collateral *damage* to a great *frenzy* of a darkness we allow –

Not only destroying the *weak* –

But depriving *ourselves* of the light of *Christ* for *all* the world to see.

So, I close with a *remarkable* challenge, to be that light that *defies* the power of darkness:

I quote Mother *Teresa* – *Saint* Teresa of Calcutta who said:

“People are often unreasonable, illogical and *self-centered*;

Forgive them *anyway*.

If you are *kind*, people may *accuse* you of selfish, ulterior motives;

Be kind *anyway*.

If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you;

Be honest and frank *anyway*.

What you spend years building, someone could destroy overnight;

Build *anyway*.”