

The Gospel Background and Reflection Questions in the usual format start on the next page this week. This page is reserved for a personal note from Father Paul.

To our readers:

This ministry of writing Reflections on the Gospel began when I was part of the Campus Ministry at the University of Houston. There were a large number of commuter students, staff, and faculty that we did not see at our campus centers. The Reflection Questions were a way to reach out to them. The Reflection Questions centered on the Sunday Gospel and added some background material. The format was simple but brought together some insights from Catholic scripture scholars and helped the readers see the Gospel as whole, not just individual texts that were read at Sunday Mass. The real heart of the Reflection Questions was that they asked people to see their own life experiences as windows to experience the Sunday Gospel as being addressed to them in their life journey. They also encouraged people to talk to God from their own experience of reflection on the Gospel.

While the format and content has changed some through the years, the goal has been to help people hear the Gospel as addressed to them and help them to respond authentically.

A great deal has changed in my life since this ministry began. I have run five marathons, studied Spiritual Direction, been involved in a number of different ministries, and found my way to Twelve Step meetings. Like most of us, I lived through the COVID pandemic. Personally, I have lived through a couple of major health issues, and I recently learned that my prostate cancer has returned. I am grateful that, over the last year or so, I have had some of the best and most caring kind of medical care available. But, at my last meeting with my oncologist, he indicated that I have about six months of life remaining.

It is time for me to use those six months well, and be in my own honest dialogue with God. Fortunately, Sister Anne Marie Lom and Joe Thiel talked some months ago about the time when I would need to step away from this ministry. They have agreed to become the new face of the Reflection Questions. They both have been a special part of this ministry for years. I am grateful for their willingness to see that it continues. So, this will be the last week that I will be the lead author of the Reflection Questions.

I appreciate your participation in this ministry. I hope it has blessed you in your personal journey with God. I thank you for your prayers and support!

Sincerely,
Father Paul Gallagher, OFM

February 8, 2026
5th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Matthew 5:13-16

Jesus said to his disciples: "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.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.

Background:

Matthew often describes Jesus' teaching to the crowds and to the disciples. After his own baptism, Jesus moved to Capernaum where he began to preach. After calling the first disciples, Jesus is again described by Matthew as "proclaiming the Gospel of the kingdom." (Matt 4:23) In the beginning of Matthew's fifth chapter, the disciples approached Jesus and he began to teach them. The first instruction Jesus gave them was the beatitudes. Jesus concluded the beatitudes by telling the disciples that they should consider themselves blessed "when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me." (Matt 5:11) The Gospel text for this week follows, with more statements about those who have chosen to become his followers. Jesus draws on salt and light, two common household items, as he asks them to see themselves anew.

Salt was not only used as a seasoning, but it was and is now essential for sustaining life. It was an important preservative, a bleaching agent, used in purifying food, and a catalyst in the community oven. Because of the scarcity of wood, camel or donkey dung was mixed with salt, shaped into patties, and dried. The dried patties were then placed on slabs of unrefined salt and used as fuel in ovens. The salt acted as a catalyst in burning the dung. Eventually the salt was absorbed, and all that remained was a block of minerals. These blocks were placed in mud roads and paths, especially during the rainy season. Matthew uses both functions of the mineral block—the oven and the foot path—when he says to the disciples 'you are salt for the "earth-ovens." The word used carries both meanings, "earth" and "clay oven."

Because salt was such an essential part of daily life, it was natural that it would be incorporated into people's religious life also. Leviticus recorded that each cereal offering must be seasoned with salt. "Every cereal offering that you present to the Lord shall be seasoned with salt. Do not let the salt of the covenant of your God be lacking from your cereal offering. On every offering you shall offer salt." (Lev 2:13) Paul in his writing to the Colossian community states, "Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you know how you should respond to each one." (Col 4:5) Jesus used this rich symbol to instruct his disciples on how they were to be of service not to themselves, but to others.

The other rich symbol used in this text is that of light. Light was part of even poor and modest one-room homes that usually only had one small window. A single light was placed on a lampstand that provided light for the house. Without the convenience of matches, these lights were valued and protected. In a world without artificial illumination in buildings and on streets, light could be seen from a great distance at night. These lights were a welcome sight to travelers caught in the wilderness and in the darkness.

Here Jesus has taken two everyday but essential elements of daily life and used them to instruct his disciples. He tells them that they are the salt of the earth, and the light of the world. He does not say that if you do this or that you will be like the salt of the earth and the light of the world. He asks the rhetorical question of what if salt loses its taste. The disciples all know that salt does not lose its taste, just as the light of the city on a hill can not be hidden. Jesus is teaching them about their new identity as his disciples, an identity that they themselves may not even perceive or understand.

Reflection Questions:

1. What is your experience of light or of being without light? What do you recall of the circumstances and how you were feeling at the time?
2. What is your experience of salt, such as used in food, to melt ice on roads, or in salty waters?
3. Has anyone ever commented about a quality that they have observed in you, that you yourself were not aware of? Do you recall how you responded when you heard the comment?
4. What do you think was going through the minds of those early disciples as they heard Jesus say to them that they were the salt of the earth and the light of the world?
5. If a person is described as being the salt of the earth, what would you expect them to be like?
6. Can you also think of places in the Gospel where Jesus seems to be a person who sets fires within his community?
7. The last line of this Gospel states that our good works are to be done so that others first of all see our good works, and second, are led by them to praise God. Do you find these words a comfort, a challenge, an encouragement, or something entirely different?
8. What would you like to tell Jesus about what you are feeling as hear this Gospel today?

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click there will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for February 8, 2026, the Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Thus says the Lord:

Share your bread with the hungry, shelter the oppressed and the homeless;
clothe the naked when you see them, and do not turn your back on your own.
Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your wound shall quickly be healed;
your vindication shall go before you, and the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.
Then you shall call for help, and the Lord will answer and say: Here I am!
If you remove oppression, false accusation and malicious speech;
if you bestow your bread on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted;
then light shall rise for you in the darkness,
and the gloom shall become for you like midday.

*The just man is a light in darkness to the upright; he is gracious and merciful and just.
Well for the man who is gracious and lends, who conducts his affairs with justice.
He shall never be moved; the just one shall be in everlasting remembrance.
An evil report he shall not fear; his heart is firm, trusting in the Lord.*

*His heart is steadfast; he shall not fear. Lavishly he gives to the poor;
His justice shall endure forever; his horn shall be exalted in glory.*

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, proclaiming the mystery of God,
I did not come with sublimity of words or of wisdom.
For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.
I came to you in weakness and fear and much trembling,
and my message and my proclamation were not with persuasive words of wisdom,
but with a demonstration of Spirit and power,
so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

Jesus said to his disciples: "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.
You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden.
Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket;
it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house.
Just so, your light must shine before others,
that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father."

Excerpts from Isaiah 58:7-10; Psalm 112:4-9; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; and Matthew 5:13-16

Friends,

Here are the Gospel background and reflection questions for February 8th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. And this time the attached reflection is preceded by a personal note from Fr. Paul as well.

The Gospel from Matthew continues from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. We have come to the part where Jesus tells his disciples, "You are the salt of the earth," and "You are the light of the world... Your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father."

The other readings have references to light in the darkness, the merciful acts that radiate this light, and the glory in the Lord that follows. In the first reading from Isaiah, the Lord instructs, "Share bread with the hungry, shelter the oppressed, and clothe the naked. Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your wound shall quickly be healed. Remove from your midst oppression, false accusation and malicious speech." Psalm 112 rejoins, "The just man is a light in darkness to the upright; his heart is steadfast; he shall not fear. Lavishly he gives to the poor; his justice shall endure forever." In the second reading, Paul writes to the Corinthians, "I did not come to you with sublimity of words or of wisdom. I resolved to know nothing except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. I came to you trembling with a demonstration of Spirit and power, so that your faith might rest on the power of God."

Jesus tells us our light is not to be hidden, but instead, "set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house." The gifts that we are blessed with as Christians, as followers of Christ, are not intended to be experienced in private only, but to be shared, in due time, and, to borrow a word from today's Psalm, "lavishly."

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!