

## **5th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Week of February 6**

**Reading I:** Isaiah 58:7-10

**Reading II:** 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

**Gospel:** Matthew 5:13-16

The salt and light gospel of this weekend contains that strange line about salt losing its taste. This line has puzzled many including me, as it is hard to understand how salt can lose its taste.

John Pilch in his excellent series, *The Cultural World of Jesus*, offers this explanation; in the Middle East in Jesus' time and today, you will find these same clay-ovens next to houses and in use. We have a young friend from Nigeria whose mother cooks in one daily.

The common fuel for these ovens is dung. A duty of young girls was to gather the dung and mix it with salt and put it in the sun to dry. This is still practiced in third world countries and the Middle East today.

When it was ready these dung patties were placed on a slab of salt in the base of the clay ovens. Salt has a catalytic property which causes the dung to burn. Eventually the salt slab loses its catalytic ability and becomes useless and is thrown out. In the Hebrew and Aramaic languages the same word means "earth" and "clay oven".

This is the image Jesus had in mind when He tells His disciples they are the salt of the earth. They are to bring His word to the world and make it burn brightly so that it will light the way to His kingdom. Jesus is telling us the very same thing with His word today. Recall the first reading from Isaiah. Does it sound something like last weekend's beatitudes? Once again we are being given our duty as disciples of Jesus.

As I sometimes say a little context helps us all understand the scriptures a little better.

In His peace,  
Deacon Jerry