

Pope Francis and the Salty Christians

Theme: We are called to be "salt" in the world. Proper 21/Ordinary26, Year B

Object: A shaker of salt, a brightly colored shirt, a leather belt, a plastic toy.

Scripture: "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other." Mark 9:50 (NIV)

Here is some salt. Try some. What would you say about this salt?

Everyone knows about salt -- we use it every day to make our food taste better. Can you imagine eating a hamburger and fries without salt? They would be pretty tasteless, wouldn't they?

Some of you may not know that making our food taste better is just one of many uses for salt. I read that salt is used in making over 14,000 different products. Here are just a few of the many uses of salt.

- Salt is used in **fixing the dye in fabrics** like this pretty shirt. Without salt, the bright colors that we wear today would quickly wash out of our fabrics. What a dull place the world would be without salt!
- Salt is also used in making **leather** (tanning hides). Without salt we would not have many of the leather products that we use every day-- like this belt.
- Salt is used in the chemical industry to make **plastics**. Without salt, we might not have many of the toys that we play with every day which are made from plastic.

We have known about the usefulness of salt for many years. At one time, salt was so important that people were paid with salt. Since salt is so important, is it any wonder that Jesus told us that we were to be like salt to the world? Listen to the words of Jesus. "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? **Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other.**" I think that he was saying that we should **flavor our world with love** and that we should allow him to use us in making the world a better place.

How about you? **Are you allowing Jesus to use you to be salt to the world?**

Dear Jesus, help us to flavor our world with love and to allow you to use us in making the world a better place. Amen

Have you ever watched the show "How It's Made?" I really like that tv show, which illustrates how something is put together or manufactured. That has always been an interest of mine. They will show how pencil sharpeners are made, baseball bats, auto parts, and even 3D printers. I've always been interested in how things *and* people are created, how people got to be as they are.

Someone has said, "People become what they are treated as being." In other words, their environment and upbringing have a great deal to do with how they are today. Where did our personalities come from? Why do some see a glass of water half full and some see it half empty? Why does someone suddenly become unethical or immoral when that has never been the case with them? Why do some people love God and others don't? Some are raised in poverty, others by at least one addicted parent. Some are raised in a strict environment, while others in a loose one in which nearly anything goes. A good question to ask might be, "How was I made?", which means what influenced who I am today. Might be an interesting brunch conversation today.

It seems to me that the goal of the church is to create salty Christians. Jesus said, "Everyone will be salted with fire," meaning that everyone will be seasoned by adversity – which is a good thing,

since adversity builds character and wisdom. Salt is a valuable part of human life. It is a preservative, it is a necessary part of our diet (but not too much). There is road salt, sea salt, and table salt. There is kosher salt and Himalayan pink salt and black salt. There is Epsom Salt and rock salt and colored bath salts. In fact, there are even some who gently rub a little salt on a child at baptism to show that now the child will be “preserved” by Christ and held firmly in the arms of the Lord forever.

And then Jesus said, “Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.” In other words, don’t lose your saltiness because it is nigh unto impossible to re-flavor yourself. If you lose your saltiness, how can you be re-seasoned? “Inspid” is a rather strong word, but it means “unsalty.” Inspid means bland and tasteless. Larry Powell says, “An inspid person is one who stands for nothing, contributes nothing, is dull, unimaginative, shallow, harmless, and a fence-straddler. Jesus encouraged the Church to be salt, avoiding inspidness.” ([Glimpses Through The Dark Glass](#) by Larry D. Powell)

John Krahn says, “It takes very little effort to be tasteless in today’s world. But God wants us to be salty characters ... not in a racy, earthy sense but in an enhancing sense. Christians should enrich the lives of others. Having an engaging manner, we should cause people who meet us to comment, ‘He is so refreshing.’ ‘She is delightful; her faith makes her sparkle.’

“Christians should never become completely satisfied with themselves. You must always believe that you are in the hands of God ready for remolding. You ought to be willing to pass his salt in whatever way God commands you. ‘Not my will, O Lord, but yours be done in my life,’ is the Christian’s prayer.” ([Seasonings For Sermons, Vol. III](#) by John H. Krahn)

Pope Francis is a salty Christian. Don’t be fooled by his speaking manner, which is slow and deliberate and accented in English. What he says is filled with salt for a salt-hungry world. One person has said that he brings hope to a world hungry for it. He flavors the lives of the poor and homeless with his presence with them and his advocacy on their behalf. At the United Nations General Assembly, the largest gathering of dignitaries in the world, on Friday Pope Francis said that “the environment is a “fundamental good” in all religions, and that a “selfish and boundless thirst” for power and wealth harms the planet and people alike. (<http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/pope-francis-visits-america/pope-francis-america-u-n-speech-touches-environment-poverty-n433526>)

Here are 3 “s’s” that might make it easier to remember what I’m trying to say. Salty Christians have:

- ✚ **Savior** love;
- ✚ They **season** their conversations with Christ-talk; and
- ✚ They **serve** others.

If indeed baptism “salts” us with the preserving and ever-present love of Jesus, that is quite a gift. If someone loves us with a love willing to die for us, that’s pretty precious, don’t you think? One would be foolish not to love such a person, especially the Savior. So, a salty Christian first has **Savior love** – genuine affection for the Son of God.

Then, a salty Christian **seasons** his/her conversation with Christ-talk. S/he doesn’t shy away from referring to God with friends, relatives, or others. S/he doesn’t mind sharing what God means to her/him and why. S/he might be proactive with inquiring about someone they haven’t seen in church, contacting them and telling them they have been missed.

And, a salty Christian **serves** and has a servant lifestyle. If I may be so personal and bold: our predecessor pastor, H. Lee Hebel, and his wife, Edith, adopted a servant lifestyle which they

maintained through a lifetime of marriage and which Edie continues to live. Others always occupied a place before themselves, and giving was FIRST-nature, not second-nature. From their active world hunger advocacy to their trail maintenance in the forests near their former home in Karthaus, PA, Lee and Edie lived a servant lifestyle. Lee was, and Edie is, a salty Christian.

Is anyone interested in becoming the same? How is a salty Christian “made,” “created?” By letting God hold the reins of your life, being open to God’s lead instead of self-determination. By living our baptisms and taking seriously that God sends the baptized out in mission to season the world with love. That’s what we just taught our children. Let us do the same.

The Rev. Robert E. Mitman