

Dear Friends,

What are your thoughts on salt? Too much isn't good for us, so we're told. Most people think of salt as a white food seasoning found in the salt shaker on the dinner table. It is that, but there is more to it. Salt is one of the most effective and widely used of all food preservatives, found in every kind of food, from steaks to popcorn, bringing out a food's natural flavors.

Salt also purifies and softens, cleans and preserves. It is an important element in the making of glass, building roads, manufacturing soap and shampoo, bleaching paper and cooling nuclear reactors; and, as we experience during these cold winter months, salt is used for the de-icing of our road surfaces. There are over 14,000 uses of salt. By itself, though, salt is useless and eating a handful of those white granules doesn't exactly taste great.

In our Gospel for this Sunday Jesus refers to his disciples as "salt of the earth." To what is he referring? He's saying a few things. First, disciples give flavor to this world of ours. We flavor it with compassion, hope, mercy, forgiveness, peace and love, for example. Secondly, Jesus is saying that his disciples are an essential element that preserves our world from decay. We preserve the world by living lives of integrity and truth, honesty and fidelity, selflessness and service; and Jesus is saying that our simplest acts of charity can be a "salt" for the world, unmistakable evidence of the presence of God in our midst.

How good all that is to remember in these days of executive orders that, among other things "suspend issuance of visas and other immigration benefits to nationals of seven predominantly Muslim countries for 90 days; indefinitely suspend resettlement of refugees from Syria, with a possible exception for those who are 'religious minorities' in their home countries and facing religious persecution; and suspends virtually the entire U.S. refugee resettlement program for 120 days" (USCCB).

"While recognizing that our government has a duty to protect the security of its people," as a joint statement from the USCCB recently stated, "we must nevertheless employ means that respect both religious liberty for all, and the urgency of protecting the lives of those who desperately flee violence and persecution. It is our conviction as followers of the Lord Jesus that welcoming the stranger and protecting the vulnerable lie at the core of the Christian life."

Having referred to his disciples as "salt," Jesus warns, "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." Essentially Jesus is warning us not to lose our purpose, but to take special care to retain the essential properties of our mission, of our identity, to flavor and preserve.

Jesus' call to be "salt" for the world is our challenge to live the Gospel we have heard and profess to believe.

Peace and blessings,

Father John