

**5th Sunday of the Year A**  
**Matthew S. O'Donnell**

**Lectionary:**

Isa 58:7-10 [Acting justly brings light in darkness]  
 Ps 112:4-5, 6-7, 8-9 [The just person will be a light in the darkness]  
 1 Cor 2:1-5 [Paul preaches Christ crucified]  
 Matt 5:13-16 [You are salt of the earth; you are the light of the world]

**Possible preaching themes:**

- Isaiah speaks to the **promise of blessing** that comes to those whose behaviors and actions are reflective of selfless living. Acts of justice and mercy become like light in the midst of darkness.
- Jesus uses the images of **salt and light** to speak about a life of discipleship. Jesus offers these metaphors to describe how one can live as his disciple—Jesus seeks to make a connection between who a disciple is and what a disciple does. Our life of discipleship becomes actualized as we seek to live out the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.
- Paul preaches a bold message but does so from a place of lowness and humility. **Humility** is not the same as weakness. Paul preaches Christ crucified and invites the hearers of this word into the mystery of how Jesus crucified reveals the power of God.

**Possible scientific resources:**

- **Light** is a form of energy that dispels darkness [https://science.nasa.gov/ems/03\\_behaviors](https://science.nasa.gov/ems/03_behaviors)
  - Light is a type of electromagnetic radiation visible to the human eye
  - “When a light wave encounters an object, they are either transmitted, reflected, absorbed, refracted, polarized, diffracted, or scattered”
  - The longer or shorter the wavelengths of light, and the particular object it hits, determines how the human eye will see the light
- **Salt** is a chemical compound (NaCl) that is used for flavoring and preservation. <https://www.acs.org/content/acs/en/education/resources/highschool/chemmatters/past-issues/2015-2016/february-2016/salt-facts.html#:~:text=By%20Chris%20Eboch%20February%202016&text=Unfortunately%2C>

%20taking%20too%20much%20salt, have%20recommended%20consuming%20less%20salt.

- The over consumption of salt by human beings can have severe health challenges
- Salt is essential for every cell in the human body
- The nervous system, brain, and muscles communicate via electrical signals and sodium ions play a critical role in ensuring this system works properly

- **Humility** is an attribute and behavior that can be cultivated  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/21/health/psychology-humility-pride-behavior.html>
  - Studying humility, as part of what has been labeled “positive” psychology, has seen growing interest in recent years (research looking at personality traits)
  - In a study by Dr. Krumrei Mancuso, those scoring high for this trait of humility are less aggressive and less judgmental, even after being challenged on personal (e.g., religious) views

## **Homily outline on Called to be Light (taking 1<sup>st</sup> path, above)**

- **Light illuminates darkness**

- Think back to the last time you stood in darkness
  - What were you feeling in that space?
  - Fear? Calm? Peace?
- Darkness has a way of making us feel enveloped in a nothingness that we cannot see
- In absolute darkness, you cannot even see your hand in front of your face!
- Light illuminates the darkness
  - Even the faintest flicker of a candle helps us see
  - The brighter the light, the dimmer the darkness
  - An overabundance of light can force us to turn our eyes away

### **Light reflects, absorbs, scatters**

- Light reflects <https://www.sciencelearn.org.nz/resources/48-reflection-of-light>
  - Think of standing near still water, seeing your own reflection in the water
  - Occurs when incoming light “bounces off an object”
  - Reflection is caused by a combination of the size of wavelengths and the type of object receiving the light (smooth or rough)
  - Light reflects at the same angle it is received
- Light absorbs [https://science.nasa.gov/ems/03\\_behaviors](https://science.nasa.gov/ems/03_behaviors)
  - Recall walking across a parking lot on a warm, summer day
  - “Photons from incident light hit atoms and molecules and cause them to vibrate”
  - Darker objects absorb more light, emitting heat known as thermal energy
- Light scatters  
[http://www.atmo.arizona.edu/students/courselinks/spring08/atmo336s1/courses/fall13/atmo170a1s3/1S1P\\_stuff/scattering\\_of\\_light/scattering\\_of\\_light.html](http://www.atmo.arizona.edu/students/courselinks/spring08/atmo336s1/courses/fall13/atmo170a1s3/1S1P_stuff/scattering_of_light/scattering_of_light.html)

- Scattering occurs when light bounces off an object in a variety of directions
  - Molecules in the air, for example, can scatter light
- **Jesus says, “You are the light of the world”**
  - Is this just a spiritual aspiration? Or is this something we can actually live?
  - Matt 5:14-16: “...No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket...”
  - Light reflects
    - Jesus says, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12)
    - As followers of Jesus, we are called to reflect his light in the world
    - We become a reflection, an imitation of Jesus
    - Are we open to encountering Jesus, or are there still some rough parts about us that might dim the light of Christ?
  - Light absorbs
    - Jesus says, “You are going to have the light just a little while longer” (John 12:35)
    - As followers of Jesus, we are invited to absorb the promise of life that is offered
    - The more time we spend with Jesus, the more our hearts, minds, and spirits are open
    - Fresh encounters with Jesus have the power to shake those parts of ourselves that need to be made new
  - Light scatters
    - Jesus says, “While I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (John 9:5)
    - As Jesus calls believers into the Beloved Community, he entrusts them with a mission to share Good News throughout the world
    - As disciples, we should never want to hold on to the Good News for ourselves
    - Our mission as Church is to share light, life, and love
- Isaiah says, “Then your light shall break forth like the dawn” (Isa 58:8)
  - Becoming more like Jesus, who is the light of the world, is our way of bringing hope to a hurting world
  - Feeding the hungry, caring for the afflicted, housing the homeless, clothing the naked are acts of mercy and justice
    - Such actions share light
    - Such actions absorb pain and bring about healing
    - Such actions are reflections of Jesus’ own care for the hurting
  - “Then your light shall rise in the darkness, and your gloom shall become like midday” (Isa 58:10)
    - Living as a reflection of the divine, we strive for holiness
    - Absorbing the relentless love of God, we become more fully ourselves
    - In accepting the mission to scatter God’s love, we share light in life’s darkest moments
    - Each of us can reflect, absorb, and scatter light in varying degrees—a single spark can light a fire!

**Tags: darkness, light, physics, reflection**

## **About the Preaching with the Sciences Initiative**

A primary way Roman Catholics explore their faith and nourish their spirituality is by participating in Sunday Mass and actively engaging in the homily. However, few preachers explicitly connect faith or spirituality with science. The Preaching with the Sciences initiative, made possible by a generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation, gathers scientists and leading homiletics to explore the positive contributions science can make to preaching, and consequently contribute to more contemporary modes of believing. Such contributions are grounded in the rich imaginations that scientists bring to their work as well as in scientific discoveries that have a potential for revealing religious truths and even shedding new insight on ancient teachings and beliefs.

With guidance from world-renowned scientists with differing areas of expertise, a select number of homiletics will draft homily outlines for preaching key Sundays and feast days across the 3-year lectionary

cycle. Over 100 homily outlines will highlight some of the way's sciences and the contemporary search for religious meaning can interface. These free homiletic resources have the potential to influence thousands of preachers seeking help each week in crafting sermons and helping to shape a scientifically informed religious imagination among future preachers.