

- Those of you who are familiar with the Latin Mass know that at the very end of the Mass, right after the final blessing, the priest reads what's known as the Last Gospel, which is the Prologue to the Gospel of John.
- This first chapter of John's Gospel is really one of the most powerful passages in all of Scripture, for in it is the proclamation that Jesus is both God and man, that He is the Word-made-Flesh.
- And as the priest reads this Gospel, he genuflects as he says, "Et Verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis." "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."
- Very beautifully, this Last Gospel refers to Jesus as the Light that shines in the darkness that the darkness cannot overcome.
- Throughout the seasons of Advent and Christmas, Holy Mother Church repeatedly uses the symbolism of light to remind us that Jesus Christ is the Light of the World.
- Things like Advent wreaths, candles in the windows, and even Christmas lights – which for many is a completely secular thing – are, in a Catholic context, symbols of Christ and the power He exerts over the darkness of sin.
- So our increased use of candles during this time of year is not meant to be decorative, but rather symbolic. It's all meant to remind us that there is a Light that shines in the darkness of our world, a Light the darkness cannot overcome.
- And that Light is Jesus Christ, the Word-made-Flesh!
- This symbol of Christ as our light found its culmination this past week in the beautiful Feast of the Presentation, also known as "Candlemas," which is the feast during which the candles used at Mass for the upcoming year traditionally are blessed.
- Yet even with Candlemas behind us, Holy Mother Church does not wish to move beyond this symbolism just yet – powerful and important as it is.
- After two months of meditating upon Christ as the Light of the World, the light shining in the darkness that sin and death cannot overcome, Holy Mother Church encourages us to be lights ourselves!
- In the Gospel today Jesus tells us that we are the light of the World, and that our lights must shine before others.
- The prophet Isaiah encourages us to perform works of mercy for others as a means of being light. He says that our charity makes our light "break forth like the dawn", so that when others see our good works, they will give glory to our heavenly Father.
- Being this light is our baptismal call. It is both a duty and a privilege. At baptism we all receive the light of Christ symbolized by a candle that is lit from the paschal candle. When we're given this candle, we're told to keep the light of Christ burning brightly within us throughout our lives.
- Those lighted candles we receive at our baptism are a sign of the divine radiance of Christ, Who came to expel the darkness of sin and division and to make the whole world shine with the brilliance of His eternal light.
- Those baptismal candles also remind us how brightly our souls should shine when we go to meet Christ at the end of our lives.
- But, interestingly, light isn't the only symbol given to us in the Gospel today. Before our Lord calls us to let our lights shine before others, He reminds us that we are also "the salt of the earth." It's important that we don't lose sight of this symbol.
- In our English language we often refer to people as being "salt of the earth," by which we mean

that someone is decent, dependable, honest, and unpretentious – if not common and hard working.

- A person who is “salt of the earth” is someone you can count on to be fair, honest, and diligent – one who doesn’t make an unnecessary fuss about anything and who will tell you truth about something even when it’s painful.
- I think this understanding is pretty close to what our Lord was intending when He told His disciples that they are the salt of the earth, and these are certainly qualities we should all strive for. But there’s more to it, I think, than that.
- Keep in mind that the primary purpose for salt in the ancient world was as a preservative. Meats were salted in order to stave off decay.
- As the salt of the earth, we must be like the first disciples who, by their preaching and teaching, helped to preserve the world from the eternal decay of sin and death.
- This means that we must be willing to live our faith out in the world, not hiding the fact that we are Catholics, and certainly not living like those who have no faith and who allow works of darkness a place in their lives.
- In telling us that we are the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world,” Jesus is telling us that our discipleship to Him is not just about us and our own salvation.
- He’s telling us that we have a responsibility to go out into the world, to take the Good News of the Gospel to others, to lead others to Him!
- And certainly the apostles came to understand this, for they went to the ends of the earth to share the truth about our Lord’s death and resurrection. They didn’t keep the Gospel to themselves. They shared it and even died for it!
- There are so many secular forces at work in our world today that would try to make us feel ashamed of our Christian beliefs and values, forces that even mock and ridicule our Faith.
- Yet we are not the ones who should ever feel ashamed of what we believe. While some may consider the Church’s teachings to be archaic, intolerant, and impossible to keep, they are nonetheless true for they are rooted in Christ!
- We must be confident that we have the truth and be bold in sharing it!
- While we should never force our Christian beliefs on others, we must never shy away from sharing our faith or living it publicly, for this is how we let our light shine before others; this is how we become the salt of the earth that helps preserve souls unto eternity.
- Note, too, that our failure to be the salt of earth will have consequences for us. Our Lord says today, “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.”
- In other words, God expects us to be His witnesses in the world. He expects us to live out our faith with integrity and in a manner that is inviting to others.
- My brothers and sisters, how bright is the light you shine before others? Does the salt of your faith still have its taste?
- Through the grace of the Sacraments and the intercession of the saints, may we all be bright lights that help drive away the dark elements of our world. May we all be the salt of the earth that helps preserve souls unto eternity.