

The Still Point
A Time of Meditation and Reflection
The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

... At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance...

T.S. Eliot, *Burnt Norton*

Peace on each one who comes in need;
Peace on each one who comes in joy.
Peace on each one who offers prayers;
Peace on each one who offers song.
Peace of the Maker, Peace of the Son,
Peace of the Spirit, the Triune One.

Opening Prayer

Spirit of energy, Spirit of change, in whose power Jesus is anointed to be the hope of the nations: pour yourself also upon us, without reserve or distinction, that we may have confidence and strength to plant your justice on the earth, through Jesus Christ.
Amen.

The Gospel

Matthew 5:13-20

Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

Poem: "The Candle Indoors"

by Gerard Manley Hopkins (b. 1844)

Some candle clear burns somewhere I come by.
I muse at how its being puts blissful back
With yellowy moisture mild night's blear-all black,
Or to-fro tender trambeams truckle at the eye.

By that window what task what fingers ply,
I plod wondering, a-wanting, just for lack
Of answer the eagerer a-wanting Jessy or Jack
There God to aggrandise, God to glorify.—

Come you indoors, come home; your fading fire
Mend first and vital candle in close heart's vault:
You there are master, do your own desire;

What hinders? Are you beam-blind, yet to a fault
In a neighbour deft-handed? Are you that liar
And cast by conscience out, spendsavour salt?

"The Lantern Out of Doors"

Sometimes a lantern moves along the night,
That interests our eyes. And who goes there?
I think; where from and bound, I wonder, where,
With, all down darkness wide, his wading light?

Men go by me whom either beauty bright
In mould or mind or what not else makes rare:
They rain against our much-thick and marsh air
Rich beams, till death or distance buys them quite.

Death or distance soon consumes them: wind
What most I may eye after, be in at the end
I cannot, and out of sight is out of mind.

Christ minds: Christ's interest, what to avow or amend
There, eyes them, heart wants, care haunts, foot
follows kind,
Their ransom, their rescue, and first, fast, last friend.

Meditation

Today's Gospel reading invites us to consider ourselves as lights to the world and as salt of the earth. As is the case with so much of Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, the imagery here is earthy and elemental, giving us common images of everyday life instead of ephemeral, abstract teachings untethered from reality. This is, after all, the Word made Flesh, preaching to his very fleshy and carnal followers to whom 'light' and 'salt' would be tangible and accessible metaphors. The focus on light within the context of the church year tells us that our own light (God within us, perhaps) is the same light that guided the Magi on Epiphany and the same light that prompted Simeon to break out in song at the feast of the Presentation (celebrated on February 2), proclaiming the child Jesus as "a light to lighten the Gentiles".

For many of us, letting our lights shine before others is an uncomfortable invitation, especially in a culture where achievement is so often exploited for superficial or insincere reasons. Perhaps this pair of enigmatic poems by Gerard Manley Hopkins will prove helpful. In each poem, a light is seen by a viewer, a candle indoors seen by someone outside, and a lantern outdoors seen by someone inside. And in each poem, the light is attractive, appealing, and becomes not a simple metaphor for God, but rather a spark that ignites a series of questions that lead to faith: What is this light? Whose is it? What do I do now? In the first poem, the answer seems to be "What's stopping you from looking within your own heart first?," whereas the second reminds the reader that the light that saintly people (all of us!) give off continues after death, as does the light and love of Jesus.

Questions for Reflection

- There are a couple of strange and very 'Hopkins' turns of phrases here. What do you make of the phrase 'saltsavour' given the Gospel reading for today? How do the poems' sound effects help paint the picture?
- What does it mean to you to let your light shine? What keeps us from doing so?
- The next time you pray, or worship, light a candle and observe what its light does to the room and to your senses.
- What does it mean to you to be 'salt' to others? Think of what salt looks and feels like, and then what it does to and with food.

Viewing:

- [Sister Rosetta Tharpe](#), "This Little Light of Mine"
- [Bruce Springsteen](#), "This Little Light of Mine"

Prayers

We bring before God someone whom we have met or remembered today

We bring to God someone who is hurting tonight and needs our prayer

We bring to God a troubled situation in our world

We bring to God, silently, someone whom we find hard to forgive or trust

We bring ourselves to God that we might grow in generosity of spirit, clarity of mind, and warmth of affection

We offer our thanks to God for the blessings in our lives

We name before God those who have died.

Gracious God, you hear all our prayers: those we speak aloud, those we hold in our hearts, and those prayers for which we have no words. Hear the prayers of your people, and grant them as may be best for us, for the sake of your holy name. **Amen.**

Accept our thanks for all you have done, O God. Our hands were empty, and you filled them.

May Christ's holy, healing, enabling Spirit be with us every step of the way, and be our guide as our road changes and turns, and the blessing of God our Creator, Redeemer and Giver of life be among us now and remain with us forever. **Amen.**

Poem and Reflection offered by: Matt Bentley