

Epiphany 5A  
February 5, 2023

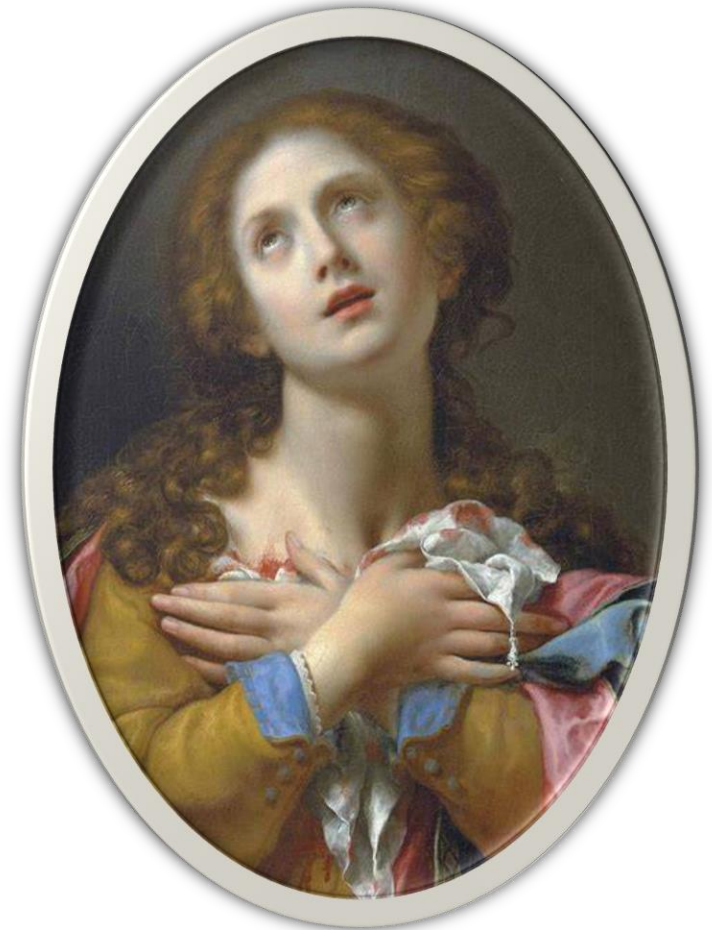


Isaiah 58:1-9a

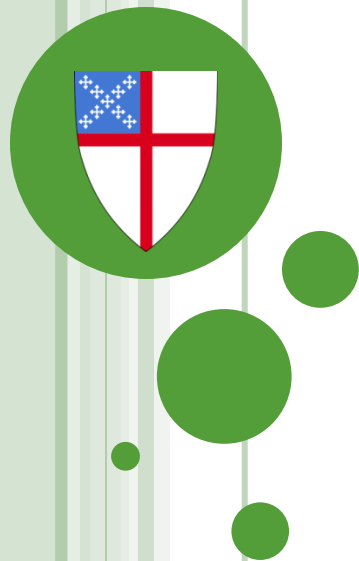
1 Corinthians 2:1-12

Matthew 5:13-20

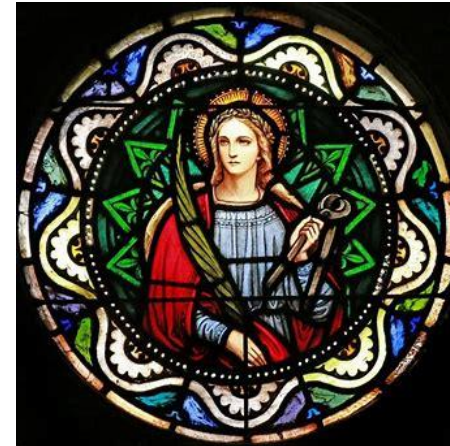
Agatha of Sicily



Martyr



**Saint Agatha of Sicily (c. 231 AD – c. 251 AD)** is a Christian saint & virgin martyr. She was born at Catania or Palermo, Sicily & is the patron saint of breast cancer patients, martyrs, & wet nurses. One of the most highly venerated virgin martyrs of Christian antiquity, Agatha was put to death during the persecution of Decius (250–253) in Catania, Sicily, for her determined profession of faith. Her written legend comprises "straightforward accounts of interrogation, torture, resistance & triumph which constitute some of the earliest hagiographic literature". According to the 13<sup>th</sup>-century Golden Legend, 15-year-old Agatha, from a rich & noble family, made a vow of virginity & rejected the amorous advances of the low-born Roman prefect Quintianus, who thought he could force her to turn away from her vow and force her to marry. His persistent proposals were consistently spurned by Agatha, so Quintianus, knowing she was a Christian during the persecution of Decius, had her arrested & brought before the judge. He was the judge. He expected her to give in to his demands when she was faced with torture & possible death, but she simply reaffirmed her belief in God. To force her to change her mind, Quintianus sent Agatha to Aphrodisia, the keeper of a brothel, and had her imprisoned there, where she suffered a month of rape, assault, and efforts to get her to abandon her vow to God and go against her virtue. Quintianus sent for her again, argued, threatened, and finally had her put in prison and had her tortured. Amongst the tortures she underwent was the cutting off of her breasts with pincers. After further dramatic confrontations with Quintianus, Agatha was then sentenced to be burnt at the stake, but an earthquake saved her from that fate; instead, she was sent to prison where St. Peter the Apostle allegedly appeared to her in a vision & healed her wounds. According to the *Legenda Aurea*, Agatha died in prison in 251 AD. Although her martyrdom has been well documented, and her veneration as a saint spread beyond her native Sicily even in antiquity, we've no reliable information concerning the details of her death. Agatha is buried at the Badia di Sant'Agata, Catania, Sicily.



St. Agatha of Sicily



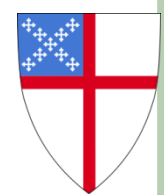




### Let's Get This Straight!

- V1: The mission--expose hypocrisy & make others aware of their sins
- People simply do not understand the magnitude / severity of their sins.
- Vv2-3: Recipients aren't practicing what they preach; outward acts do not reflect true motives
- They imagine their fasting & Sabbath-keeping have pleased YHWH.
- YHWH considers them to have been majoring in minors—faithfully keeping lesser parts of the law while neglecting (as Jesus' later told scribes/Pharisees) "weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faith"
- Vv4-6: They believe fasting creates an obligation YHWH is duty-bound to meet, an assumption that is wrong on two points;
  1. They are YHWH's creation!. So it's YHWH's right as creator to impose obligations on them, not the other way around!
  2. Fasting is but a tiny part of their religious obligation (Jewish law requires fasting only on the Day of Atonement)--faithfulness in fasting counts little if they fail to observe the other religious obligations—
- Vv 7-9: Humility, justice & charity are what earns YHWH's blessings

EPIPHANY 5A: PROPER FASTING [ISAIAH 58:1-9A]



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*Lift your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins. Day after day they seek me & delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness & did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near... Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, & oppress all your workers. Look, you fast only to quarrel, to fight & strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush & to lie in sackcloth & ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?*



## SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES THE FAST THAT GOD DESIRES

*Is not this the fast I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry & bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them & not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break like the dawn & your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call & the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help & he will say, Here I am.*

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*...Brothers & sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God...in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ crucified. I came to you in weakness, in fear & trembling. My speech & proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit & power, so your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God. Yet among the mature we speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish.*

We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.

*But we speak God's wisdom...which God decreed before the ages for our glory. No rulers of this age understood this; if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him"—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; ...Spirit searches everything ...For what human being knows what is truly human except the spirit that is within? No one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit...Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so we may understand the gifts God has freely given us.*

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### Playing to a Different Strength!

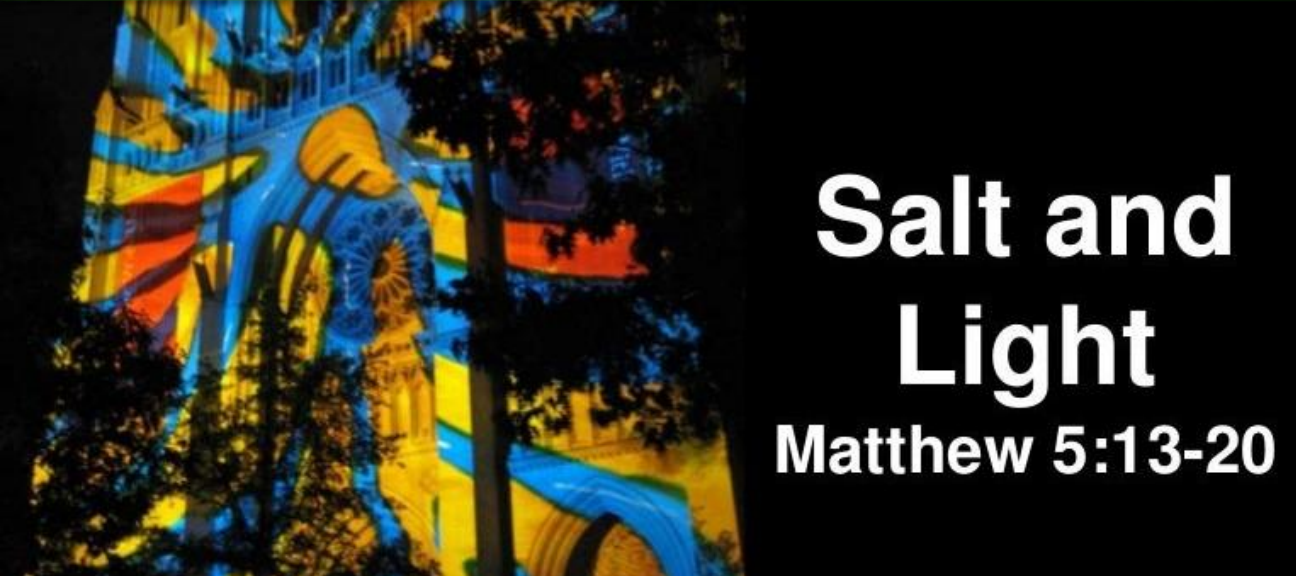
- Corinthian Christians were not wise, powerful, or of noble birth—but God chose them to work for his purposes
- God purposely chooses as agents of change those who others dismiss
- Having used Corinthians to make his point about human vs Godly wisdom, develops his sermon to Paul's sermon further illustrates that contrast.
- Aware that Greeks are more proficient in rhetoric & oratory, Paul adopts a different tactic
- Opting out of oratorical fireworks to proclaim God's mysteries, Paul simply tells them about "Jesus Christ & him crucified"—and that was sufficient!
- If Paul had used great oratory to win Corinthians to Christ, many might have been drawn to Paul vice Christ.
- Aware of different levels in spiritual growth Paul must tailor his messaging to recipients' abilities to receive it.
- Vv11: "It takes one to know one."
- Being human, we know human spirit, but only the Spirit of God knows the depths of divine mysteries.
- V12: Contrasts spirit of the world with the Spirit from God
- God's Spirit allows believers to know "gifts God freely bestows on us."
- Such gifts are not prizes we've won or deserved honors, but are freely given!



EPHAPHANY 5A: GOD'S GIFTING! [1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-12]

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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.



# Salt and Light

## Matthew 5:13-20

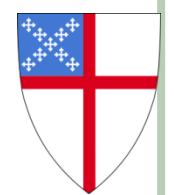
*"Do not think I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven & earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, & teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them & teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes & Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."*

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EPIPHANY 5A: BE OUR SALT & LIGHT! [MATTHEW 5:13-20]

### Metaphors of Salt & Light

--V' 13: We value salt for seasoning, a food preservative & to sustain life: A perfect metaphor for the people of God:  
•We're responsible for transforming the environment as salt transforms food  
• We are often few in number, but it is no matter. Just as a few grains of salt can make a big difference in food, so a few faithful Christians can make a big difference in the world.  
--Warning vs. complacency. If Dead Sea salt lost taste through adulteration, it was discarded as worthless  
--Danger for today's church: temptation to give too much credence to worldly values & too little to those in the Bible  
--As that happens, church loses value  
--Vv14-16: Metaphor of Light: Our light derives from a relationship with Christ  
--Light isn't our own; it is Jesus' light  
--If every Christian reflected this light the world would be very different indeed  
--Vv17-20: Jesus respected the law but eschewed 1000s of rules the scribes generated--the primary source of Jesus' conflict with scribes & Pharisees  
--Jews focused on Torah law, but their observance was less than perfect. They observed the rules without embodying its spirit--As the incarnate Word of God, Jesus embodied law perfectly, fulfilling its deepest meaning.



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