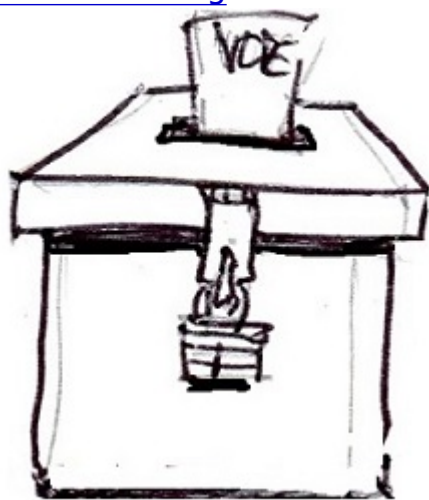


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by Pat Marrin

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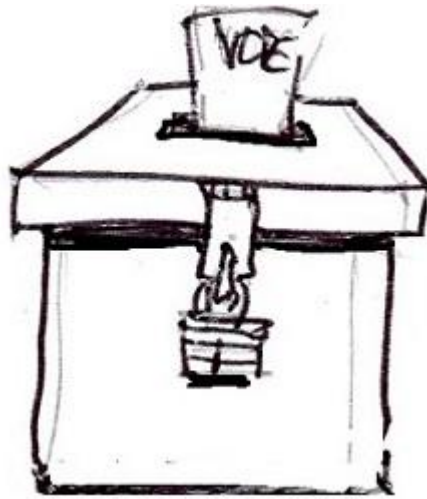
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“You are the salt of the earth ... You are the light of the world” (Matt 5:13-14).

### **Fifth Sunday of the Year**

*Isa 58:7-10; 1 Cor 2:1-5; Matt 5: 13-16*

Hearing the Word of God in the readings is incomplete if we don't also seek to apply it to our lives in current circumstances. This is the point of the document from the US Catholic Bishops, “Faithful Citizenship,” issued for election year guidance to Catholics. For a helpful summary, look at Bishop Robert McElroy's assessment at <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/bishop-mcelroy-voting-faith-and-conscience> in which he lists 10 areas of concern in the light of Catholic Social Justice Teaching. In deciding to vote for a candidate, McElroy emphasizes all 10 principles as an integrated whole that will best reveal the kind of leaders who will truly advance the common good and the rights, freedoms and responsibilities of all in a just and compassionate society.

CSJT principles are based on the Scriptures, and so today's first reading from Isaiah offers a profile of the kind of people and values we want guiding our society: “If you remove from your midst oppression, false accusation and malicious speech; if you bestow your bread on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted, then light shall rise for you in the darkness” (Isa 58:9). Campaign speeches and debates will expose candidates to this profile in tone and substance. Paul's appeal to the church at Corinth reflects his humility and experience of suffering as validating his witness to Jesus rather than eloquence or persuasiveness. In today's Gospel, Jesus wants his disciples to be salt and light in their effect on society, bringing clarity and quality instead of confusion and acrimony.

Salt and light are non-partisan by nature, influencing the process of discernment rather than predetermining the outcome. Light reveals all sides of an issue, enhances objectivity, seeks logical consistency, explores motives and long-term effects. Salt moderates discourse, avoids extremes, makes the process lively but tasteful, a shared meal instead of a food fight. With these metaphors, Jesus wanted his disciples to facilitate dialogue to resolve controversy and open minds to change. The Good News of justice and love can overcome fearmongering and propaganda only if the message is delivered by credible witnesses, models of the values it presents.

The process, like the issues, is neither simple nor clear-cut, and in a diverse and pluralistic context, different beliefs and opinions must compete for majority support, and no one candidate has all the answers on all the issues. So, voters must find leaders who will meet most of their agendas and priorities. The one thing Faithful Citizenship insists on is participation. Voters are expected to do the work of studying and discussing the issues, informing their consciences, then voting.

The Scriptures inspired an image used in many political campaigns that promise to create a “shining city on a hill.” Jesus wanted his disciples to be the light of the world and compared them to a city on a mountain that cannot be hidden but shines forth to the glory of God.

When Pope Francis was criticized for being involved in politics, he reminded his critics that the Greek word for politics means “affairs of the city.” No one is exempt from being engaged in the life of the people and the need for good governance. While the church does not choose one candidate over another, it asks its members to choose based on the values it holds. We must ask what our shining city should look like, then work to create one that welcomes us and all our brothers and sisters.

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