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Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

[Feb. 9, 2020](#)

Isaiah 58:7-10

Psalm 112

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Matthew 5:13-16

I'm sure most of us easily remember that last Sunday we held lighted candles on that feast of the presentation of Jesus in the temple where Simeon proclaimed that he was a light for all the nations. We proclaimed our own desire to be that light and held those lighted candles as we listened to the Gospel. Today very directly, Jesus tells us, "You, each of us, are the light of the world."

As I began to reflect on these Sunday readings, it just seemed so clear to me that what we need to do is accept that call to be the light of the world and carry it out mostly by listening to that first lesson today where Isaiah tells the people, "Here is true fasting: to give your bread to the hungry, to save the lost, to give the homeless a place to stay, to take care of the needs of other people." But during this week, I received a copy of the talk that Pope Francis gave when he went to Hiroshima a couple of months ago. His opening words were kind of a shock to me. Here's what he [said](#):

Here, in an incandescent burst of lightning and fire, so many men and women, so many dreams and hopes, disappeared, leaving behind only shadows and silence. In barely an instant, everything was devoured by a black hole of destruction and death. From that abyss of silence, we continue even today to hear the cries of those who are no longer.

Almost 100,000 people were destroyed in nine seconds in that burst of light. As I thought about those words of Pope Francis, I was thinking about how we are called to be the light of the world. But in that case, as a nation, we were a light that

destroyed. Again, almost 100,000 people were destroyed in nine seconds. Tens of thousands of others were left with radiation sickness as that burst of light became a dark cloud filled with radioactive dust that continued to cause sickness and death for decades.

Our nation was the light of the world. A light that was evil cannot even be captured in a word. So I thought we can't just forget that time of our being a light in such a destructive way. We must repent of that, and now more than ever become the true light of the world according to what Jesus is teaching us, not a light that destroys, incinerates, burns, leaves behind a trail of hatred and resentment, but we have to be the light that Jesus truly intended us to be.

Yes, we do have to follow what Isaiah says in our first lesson today where he tells us what true fasting is. "Would you call this a fast day acceptable to the Lord? Is not this the kind of fast that pleases me: to break the fetters of injustice, to untie the thongs of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and so to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, to bring into your house the homeless and poor, to clothe the naked and not turn away from your own kin?"

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Those are the kinds of things that we must do to be the true light that Jesus calls us to be. We have to turn away from violence and hatred, killing, war. We must stop preparing this nuclear arsenal that we continue to upgrade and threaten to use at any moment. Instead we have to become a light that reaches out to give life and love, mercy and kindness to everyone, everywhere.

Yes, Jesus calls us to be light of the world and we have to repent of how we failed so dramatically back in 1945, and how we continue to threaten to do it again. No, we must build up within the community of nations a system of love, a system of communication, a system where we try to understand each other, care for each other, make our nation a leader in building peace in the world, and each of us build peace in our community, in our families as we carry out what Isaiah describes as a true fast.

We live in a very dangerous time and at this moment we really do need to make a choice. We must reject the violence of war, the weapons that are so destructive, and

we must turn to the way of Jesus, become the light he calls us to be, a light that reaches out in love to every person starting in our families, our communities, our country, and then throughout the world. Yes, we must be that light, not the light that brought darkness and death. We thank Jesus for calling us to be the light of the world, and I hope each of us pledges to give ourselves in that task of being the true light of Jesus.

Editor's note: *This homily was given Feb. 9 at St. Ambrose Church in Grosse Pointe Park, Michigan. The transcripts of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's homilies are [posted weekly](#) to NCRonline.org. [Sign up here](#) to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.*