



**Homily**  
**by Bishop Dr Bertram Meier (Augsburg),**  
**President of the Commission for International Church Affairs and**  
**President of the Committee for Interreligious Dialogue**  
**of the German Bishops' Conference,**  
**in the Eucharist Celebration**  
**on 5 February 2023 in St Joseph's Cathedral in Abu Dhabi**

*Salt of the Earth*

My dear brothers and sisters!

As President of the Commission for International Church Affairs of the German Bishops' Conference, I convey to you the best regards from Germany. It is a great pleasure for me to celebrate Holy Mass with you here in Abu Dhabi. "You are the salt of the earth" (*Mt 5:13*). This is how Jesus described the role of those who follow him. This is also your role as Christians in this region.

I invite you to take a look back at the time of Jesus. Salt was highly valued. It was *precious* and rare. Like today, it was used *to season food*, to add some flavor. Especially in areas with a hot climate (like the Holy Land and like the Arabian Peninsula), there was a high demand for salt. Already Adam probably knew that with the sweat of his face he not only lost liquid, but also minerals.

Salt was also needed *to keep food from rotting*. As the Gospels tell us, the fishermen on the Sea of Galilee kept catching large quantities of fish. What was to be done if you couldn't sell it all fresh or eat it right away? How good when salt was at hand! It was used to preserve the fish. Finally, salt was also *a symbol of hospitality*. When a guest came to the house, the host first offered him bread and salt. Those who shared bread and salt wanted to send a signal: We have fellowship with each other.

Salt: a precious good and a seasoning, a means of preservation and an expression of community. All this resonates when Jesus tells his disciples: “You are the salt of the earth”. Today he addresses this word to us. What does this statement mean for us in concrete terms?

1. What applies to salt with regard to a fine meal applies to Christians with regard to society: Without salt, it tastes boring. In Germany and in Europe and in many of your countries of origin one can certainly say: Without Christians, our societies would have a different face. The situation might be somewhat different on the Arabian Peninsula. But here as there it is true: Just like salt, Christians are *precious*. And where we live in a situation of minority, we should always remember: A little salt is enough to give flavor! To turn a bland soup into a tasty treat, all we need is a small pinch of salt. As “salt of the earth” we should live our faith and stand up for what the Gospel teaches us. But as salt of the earth we cannot retreat into a ghetto either. In good fellowship with others, we are invited to social interaction.

2. This brings us to salt as *a seasoning*. Christians are the seasoning or even the spice of society. In some societies, the Gospel sometimes appears to be powerless. Could this perhaps be due to the fact that sometimes the witnesses of the Gospel lack some seasoning? The message of Jesus Christ cannot be experienced through paper. For paper is patient. Rather, it becomes effective through our lives. I came to Abu Dhabi as a listener, I want to experience how the Church is alive here. But against the background of my experiences in Germany, I can assure you: It is important that we are the salt of a society. May God prevent the salt from losing its flavor in the future!

3. Moreover, salt *preserves* food. It ensures that quality food is available. The function of salt with regard to meat or fish points to the service that we Christians perform as salt of the earth. We are responsible for ensuring that our fellow human beings live and thrive. This is first of all about livelihood and quality of life. Young Christians in particular have a high level of consciousness for such questions. This concerns the preservation of creation, commitment to peace, a sense of responsibility for the one world, our common home, efforts to create humane working conditions as well as other social issues.

In addition to the hunger of the body, human beings also know the hunger for recognition and love, for orientation and meaning. How often does this hunger remain unsatisfied? How often are people given bad food? We Christians are to ensure that people receive a sufficient amount of good food - for body *and* soul. Jesus invites us to promote and protect a “culture of life”.

4. Finally, salt is a sign of *community*. No one can live his Christianity on his own. Those who try run the risk of slowly losing their taste for faith. The salt becomes tasteless and dull. It is no longer good for anything. In the long run, living the Gospel is only possible together with others – a community of brothers and sisters in Christ. As Tertullian said: *One* Christian is *no* Christian. It is good to see that you form a true Christian community here – with good shepherds, places of worship, opportunities for dialogue and exchange. You are indeed salt of this earth.

In addition, to our community in Christ, there is, of course, also a fraternal bond in the wider sense: For each and every one of us is a beloved child of God, with equal dignity and equal rights. This is what celebrating International Fraternity Day should be all about.

Salt is precious and a seasoning, it preserves food and is a sign of community. Against this background, Jesus' word also imposes an obligation on us: "You are the salt of the earth". He asks the serious question: If salt loses its flavor, what can be used to make it salty again? And he directly provides the answer: The salt is no longer good for anything, it is thrown away and trampled on by people (*Mt 5:13*). Thus, let us make every effort to live up to this task, everyone with their gifts and in their place; a community that does not lose its flavor.