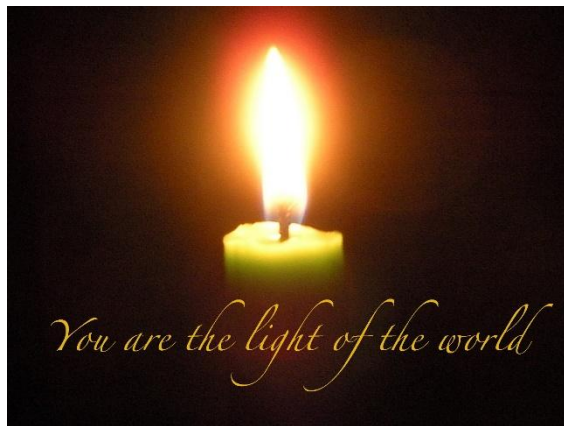


## Homily for Sunday, February 8, 2026

For most of my life, when it comes to the spiritual life, I always thought it started within me and then it becomes manifested in the outer world. In other words, firstly I get in touch with the light within me, and by letting it shine, it encourages others around me to their light shine. I saw it as a dominoes effect. Each of us initially getting in touch with a light that Jesus obviously sees in us-- otherwise he



never would have called us the "light of the world"--and then inspiring others to unleash their lights until the world is illumined with God's love, mercy, and compassion. And with all of our lights shining, the world will become a better place. The Kingdom of God will naturally

come about. How could it not? I still believe that's not a bad way of putting things together.

However, the readings might be hinting that it could work another way also. Instead of me inspiring others, it's the light I see in others that inspires me to become the best version of myself. I don't think Jesus really cares about the order of how light is transmitted as long as it's not put under a bushel basket. Jesus is more like the Nike slogan "Just Do It." Forget for a moment that the bottom line of any company's slogan is ultimately to attract the public's interest in their product so they can make more money. In 1988, Nike launched an advertisement campaign with the slogan "Just Do It" in order to inspire people to take action, to

get off the couch, regardless of their age, gender, and fitness level. Basically it was saying “Just start right here, right now. Don’t wait until you find the perfect gym to join or when life become less hectic—Just Do It.”

The prophet Isaiah is saying something similar in that first reading. He says, inspired by God of course, to loose the chains of injustice people are shackled to, to let the oppressed go free, to share your bread with the hungry, to clothe the naked, and not to turn your back on your own kin or anyone else in need. What will happen if you just do it? He says that your light will shine forth like the dawn and healing will spring up quickly. He goes on to say the fact that you helped others in need, when the day comes where you are in need, you will hear the Lord say to you, “Here I am.” If you are there for others, even on days when your heart really isn’t into it, you can be assured of God’s presence and help in your own life. But don’t do it with the expectation of a reward for your good works. Do it because it needs to be done; the world needs you to be salt and needs you to be light.

Much of our lives, though, are spent without this deep consciousness that we are indeed salt and light. Meister Eckhart, the 14<sup>th</sup> century mystic, uses the image of the wine cellar. He says we have a wine cellar, but we never drink from it. We keep drinking all this bad wine. But there’s a deeper wine cellar in each person, but we never visit it. We never bring up any of the vintage wine. Paul, after his conversion to Christ, began his ministry with doubt that he had anything good to offer. He says in that second reading, “I started my work among you without any lofty words or any wisdom. I came to you in fear, weakness and trembling. I had to

accept this, so that the Spirit alone would give me the words I was supposed to give to you. Otherwise, you wouldn't have gotten very far with my words and my poor example, but now you have the power of God guiding your lives." At some point Paul had to look at his meagre, personal resources and say to himself, "Paul, just do it. Just offer what you have. Don't wait for all the stars to align, just do it."

I don't think it's a coincidence that the first words God speaks in the Bible are "**Let there be light**" and that the first words Jesus speaks to begin his public ministry are, "***You are the light of the world.***" It's not meant to put pressure on you to perform flawlessly. It's meant for you and me to get in touch with a truth about ourselves and to live from that truth. Shining our light can have a dark side (pardon the pun). I can shine my light in such a way to make you feel inadequate in my presence, to make you feel you really don't have much to contribute compared to *my* light, *my* contribution. This isn't what Jesus meant when he said, "***put your light on a lampstand.***" To love somebody is nothing less than revealing to them their capacity to shine light as well. Shining your light has nothing to do with drawing attention to ourselves, or about looking for rewards or acceptance. It's just the opposite. When people see good works shining through us, it will act as an encouragement for them to trace those good works to the source of those good works, to your Father in heaven. When others are in touch with this transcendent source of love, they will want to radiate it to other. Light attracts light.

Jesus tells us that the entire thing starts with God. Light is already, from Day 1, embedded in our D.N.A. About 20 years ago, I read a book by Joseph Chilton

Pearce, a neuroscientist who has no religious agenda tied to his research. He approaches everything from a purely scientific starting point, yet he, interestingly, titled this particular book, The Transcendence of Biology. In other words, his scientific work has led him to believe that in the depth of our biology there is built in the drive for transcendence, the instinctual urge for the divine, for God. He's not quoting Jesus, but he's come to the same conclusion. Jesus wanted to tell us on Day 1, what this neuroscientist can only tell you at the end of his book, that there is something within each person that is divine. That's what people see in you when they trace your good works to their source—they see the divine in you.

The very first ministry, if I can call it a ministry, that I exercised in the Church, was being part of the Saint Vincent de Paul society in my home parish. I was 16 years old, and the average age of the rest of the group was 66. I thought most of those old geezers, at age 66, should be playing "Rummoli" in Shady Acres, but they weren't. They were caring for the needy. One of them, Joe, took me out for coffee one day and said, "Although, you're by far the youngest person in our group, and the only person who still has his own teeth, I want you to know something. At every moment of your life, including this very moment, someone is looking up to you. You are a light to someone, right now, without knowing it." I wasn't sure, with only 16 years under my belt, that what Joe was saying was true. But he was a recently retired high school teacher, who taught shop for 25 years. And retired teachers rarely see the impact they have on their students until 20 years after the fact. It's then, by a chance meeting in the grocery store that a 40-year-old former student tells you so. The works we do become proclamations of faith emanating

from our hears. It took the student 20 years to trace the good works to their source, but better late than never.

That's probably why the Church gives us the example of the Saints. One thing all Saints had in common was their transparency. When you saw them at work, ordinary, mundane work for the most part, you swore you were witnessing something of the divine shining through them. It's like these holy people, whether they were officially declared saints or not, were mouthing the first words of God, "Let there be light...not my light, but God's light shining through me." Does it start with me shining the light from within? Or, does it start by me being inspired by the light I first see shining in others? I don't know, and I don't think Jesus cares. Just let your light shine. Just see in yourself what Jesus has always seen in you, God's light. And like Nike—Just Do It!

~Fr. Phil